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BY CLARA VIEBIG

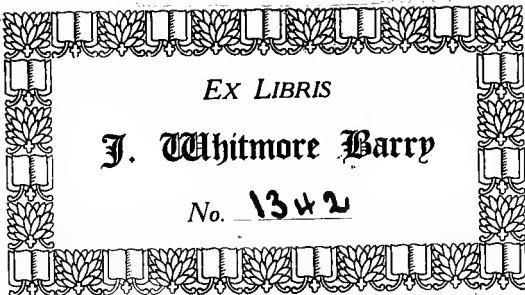
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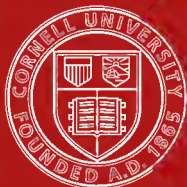
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*Das tägliche Brot*  
**OUR DAILY BREAD**

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

**ABSOLUTION**

A Novel. Crown 8vo.



OUR DAILY  
:: BREAD ::

BY  
CLARA VIEBIG

A TRANSLATION BY  
MARGARET L. CLARKE

LONDON : JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD  
NEW YORK : JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMIX

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OUR DAILY BREAD

“ Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses.”

# OUR DAILY BREAD

## I

BEHIND the sandy hill the sun is rising. High up the pines are bathed in red light; every needle of the rugged branches is sharply defined against the glowing, morning sky. A keen wind blows, and flutters the grey-white moss hanging from the old trunks, and looking like ragged beards. Shifting lights pass over the scanty grass, which hardly covers the knotted roots; golden rays dart here and there, become longer and longer, their light warmer and warmer.

Down below, in the endless distance of the fields, the dawn is still cold and grey. Steaming mists rise out of the hollows and trail their white webs over the ploughed lands till they break against the blue wall of the distant wood and disperse.

The whitewashed gables of the cottages in the village street look ghostly, only the high walls of the church show a warmer light. The wind shakes the chestnut-trees at the church gate, so that a shower of damp, yellow leaves rains down, an acrid autumnal smell rises from the falling foliage.

A flock of ducks swims in the pool in the street; noiselessly, slowly, as if asleep, one follows the other, drawing a lighter ray after it in the dark water. Now the drake shoots bolt upright, beats the water with its wings, scattering the drops far around, and the whole flock breaks out into a loud gabble.

On Barthel Heinze's dung-heap the cock gives a loud cockadoodoo, the roof-trees of the low, thatched roofs are glowing. Mother Heinze pushes back the shutters; it is light in the room. The day has come.

"Now be off," said the peasant to his eldest daughter, and got

up heavily from behind the table on which were the remains of breakfast—breadcrumbs, potato skins, and the empty soup-bowl. “Keep well, write home, an’ keep yersel’ decent. See that ye save in yer place! Send the money right home; I’ll put it in the Savings Bank at Schwerin! Don’t ye think of spending it! That I tell ye, if ye come home, and ha’ brought nothing, yer back shall smart for’t!”

“I will, father, I will,” promised the daughter.

“Mina’s a good girl,” said the mother, more gently, and with her bony hand smoothed down the folds of her daughter’s blue Sunday dress. “How well the stuff wears! Don’t ye spoil it, Mina! Ah, Heinze, let her be; she’ll get on in Berlin. She can work, that I ha’ taught her. No mistress ’ull be taken in who gets her. And don’t let any overreach ye, not even yer mistress. Look out for yoursel’, send home what yer can, and keep well.”

“I—will.” The girl was sobbing now.

Although Wilhelmina Heinze was twenty-two years old, and a tall, broad-shouldered person who could carry a hundredweight of potatoes on her back, she wept like a child. Now that it had really come to saying good-bye it was harder than she had thought possible. She took a long look round the room, where the cuckoo-clock ticked on the wall, and her parents’ bedstead with the piled-up beds on it stood by the stove.

A few steps brought her to the narrow door leading to the slip of a room where she and her three younger sisters had slept. Inside hung the little mirror bought at the fair, before which they had squabbled every Sunday, as each one wanted to look in it first; on the window-sill were the geraniums and calceolarias in full blossom.

With a cry of pain Mina sank back on her stool, and covered her face with her hands.

“Now, now,” said her mother soothingly, “don’t take on so.” She sniffed in sympathy, and rubbed her nose with the back of her hand. “Ye *would* go to Berlin! Mina, be sensible. Think what ye can earn in money, and there are six o’ ye children.’

“What would ye do here?” said her father. “Max an’ Cilla are enough, an Mollie ’ll be confirmed at Easter—we can do the work.”

With wet eyes Mina looked at her brothers and sisters one after the other. Yes, her father was right ; big enough they were. There was Max, a tall fellow of nearly eighteen, as straight as a pine. There was Cilla, sturdy and with broad hips, looking like a woman, though she was only sixteen. Then Mollie, who put up her plaits now ; then Henry, who could look after the geese, the pigs and the cow ; and then Emma, who went to school. Mina nodded understandingly. It was right, one must go ! There were too many mouths to feed from Barthel Heinze's bit of land ; the house was small, they could scarcely crowd into it. If Peter and Lisa, who came after her, had not been drowned in the duck-pond as children, she must have gone out long before. And had she not longed to earn a penny of her own ? The girls who had gone to town told wonderful tales. Sometimes one came home on a visit, then the whole village collected, and placed themselves before the door, or peeped in through the little bottle-glass window behind which the visitor stood in a cape trimmed with jet, a large white straw hat trimmed with ribbon and a long white feather, the admiration of her proud parents. Even the daughters of well-to-do peasants did not disdain going to Berlin for one or two years ; "en pension," as they said. The figures of all these town-dressed girls flashed through Mina's mind. Many a one came home with a Savings Bank book, married well, or made a good match in Berlin. Anyhow happiness was to be picked up in the street there, light work, high wages. It was right that she should go and not let Cilla, who was always talking about it, get before her. It was a good thing that she had said to her, "Leave off jabbering, I'm the eldest, I have the choice."

Giving herself an energetic shake, Mina sprang to her feet, and as her mother had done before her, wiped her nose with the back of her hand, then her eyes. She stood before her parents, a tall, strong girl, and gave each her hand in farewell.

"Good-bye, Mina," said her father, taking his pipe from his mouth, and looking at it critically. "Can send me a new 'un at Christmas ; this 'un is no beauty now. Don't forget yer church."

"Yes, yes," put in her mother.

"Save all yer can."

"Send it right home."

"Write soon." Now the daughter's tears came again.

"You write too."

Mina gave her hand to her brothers and sisters, one after the other, first the big ones, then the little ones. Emma clung to her neck; she had looked after the child from her birth and always loved her, now she gave her a sounding kiss on her mouth and cheeks. Lower and lower she bent her head to hide her grief.

"Ye do take on," said Cilla, and gave her a friendly slap on her back; "should ha' let *me* go."

"I'm going," murmured Mina, and rose. "Good-bye, all; keep well! Come, Max, take hold."

The tall, handsome boy shuffled forward unwillingly. They dragged the travelling basket out of the little room; it was small and not heavy, had cost four and sixpence at Schwerin Fair, but Mina's eyes rested on it proudly.

They all accompanied her to the door.

"Oh! my gracious!" suddenly screamed her mother, "the eggs for Aunt Mollie."

As quickly as the open wound in her leg, from which all women of her age suffered, would allow, she hobbled back into the room and drew out from under the bed a basket with the "fresh" eggs, which they had been collecting for weeks. She came back relieved and hung the heavy basket on her daughter's disengaged arm.

"Reschke would open her eyes if I sent nothing for the shop. Take care, Mina, don't smash 'em. And say to yer aunt, 'Mother's love, six dozen, new-laid.' You'll benefit, girl, she'll get ye a good place. And speak of Mollie that she don't forget she's her god-child, and that she'll be confirmed at Easter. Good-bye."

The parents remained on the doorstep, the brothers and sisters went a little way with their sister. The little ones helped Max carry the basket, and squabbled with him because he declared they made it heavier. Mollie stopped behind a little, and picked up the plums which had fallen over the garden palings; she did not at all mind giving a good shake to the overhanging branch of an apple-tree.

Cilla hung on her sister's arm and whispered into her ear,



"Get a sweetheart soon—Freier's Emil was no good—a soldier, d'ye hear, a smart one! And write to me about it."

Mina nodded. "Yer can tell Mrs. Freier her Emil can do what he likes, I'll ha' no more o' him."

"Should think so; and Mina, send me a pretty apron, or something nice. I'll do the same for ye, some day."

Mina promised everything.

To her dimmed eyes the quiet cottages right and left glided past like shadows, the neighbours were still sleeping, only in the far distance two flails were to be heard—clip-clap-clip-clap.

The brothers and sisters separated at the very last house in the village, where the milestone stands by the high-road—"Schwerin a/W. 7, 6 Kilometer."

Mina and Max, carrying the basket between them, walked briskly along the lonely road.

The sun had not quite broken through the clouds, it was still struggling to do so. The glow on the top of the sandy hill of Golmütz had disappeared, the pines were no longer red. A fleecy veil concealed the golden ball again; over the fields, to the right and left of the road, were flying white strips of the fog, carried along by the morning wind. Down in the valleys the dawn struggled with the darkness, advanced and retired, surged on and drew back. Drops fell softly from the trees by the side of the road, the grass growing on the edge of the ditches shone like silver, and the low juniper-bushes had caps of mist.

The figures of the brother and sister looked as if enveloped in steam. The long ribbons on the girl's hat fluttered in the damp autumn wind, her petticoats were sometimes blown round her legs, so that she could scarcely walk, and then bellied out like sails.

"Shan't we be too late, Max?" asked Mina anxiously, and hastened her steps. "Are ye sure the train goes about seven?"

"Time enough," said the boy phlegmatically. "Don't run so. Can't wait to get there. My, when I'm a soldier, I'll go to Berlin too."

"I'll be glad when ye come."

"Won't see much o' me. I'll ha' more to do; in the Guards I shall see the Emperor every day, and I shall grow a moustache,

and Sundays I'll go dancing. That'll be a life!" And he stretched his slim figure and threw out his chest. "I'll be free then when I'm a soldier."

She laughed in his face. "They'll drill ye fine."

He measured her with a contemptuous look. "What d'ye know about it, silly girl?"

"Silly boy."

With a jerk he set down the basket in the road.

"Carry yer muck yersel'!"

"But Max!"

"I won't, yer too saucy."

"But Max, don't begin that, I ain't said nothing, Max; take hold, the train won't wait, Max."

But he stood there sullenly, with his legs wide apart, took a piece of wood out of his waistcoat-pocket and began to pick his teeth.

"Always being ordered about. The old man does it; the old woman does it; and now ye begin. I'm glad you're going." He looked at her discontentedly, and then spat out, "Damned drudgery! I'll never be a peasant; yer all right, ye goes to town."

"Max, do help me, Max." She began to entreat. "I'll send ye something nice."

"Will ye?" he asked distrustfully.

"Certain sure."

"Take hold then." Quickly reconciled, he laughed broadly, showing all his teeth. They hastened on quickly, Mina's cheeks getting redder and redder, in her fear of losing the train. Max began to curse.

Then, all at once, they heard the sound of wheels. They looked round. Out of the moving clouds of mist, in which the village had disappeared, something dark came rapidly nearer; they heard snorting; a horse's head was quite close to them; a calf bleated. It was probably the rich peasant Obst from Rokitten, who was taking a fattened calf to the market at Schwerin.

"Mornin'."

They both stepped back humbly to the side of the road.

"Mornin'."

"You've a fine load to carry," a girl's clear voice called out.

Mina looked up astonished. Surely it was Bertha Fidler, the daughter of the village midwife? Yes, indeed, there was her fair head at the back of the cart by the calf! She had put her arm round the neck of the terrified animal, and laughed merrily. "We get on all right, sweetheart, don't we? Moo!" And she kissed the calf's nose.

The cart stopped; the peasant had to have his laugh out. That's a girl! Haha! haha! She could while away the time for you. What a good thing he had given her a lift when she asked him at Golmütz.

"Arn't ye from Golmütz too, Barthel Heinze's lot?" he called out good-humouredly to the brother and sister. "I'll give ye a lift too."

Now Max could very well have turned back, the basket could stand in the cart, and the two girls sit on it; but he was not going to give up Schwerin. It was always a great delight to saunter over the cobble-stones of the little town, with his hands in his trouser-pockets, and a cigar in his mouth. Just like a gentleman!

So he scrambled up into the cart after his sister, and crouched like a Turk at the girls' feet. The frightened calf looked over his shoulder.

"Off to Berlin?" Bertha asked Mina.

"Yes, yes, and ye?"

"Off to Berlin too."

"Oh! How glad I am we can go together." Mina quite forgot that she had never liked Bertha, and that she had hardly spoken to her till now.

They had met so seldom. Mina worked hard in the fields, Widow Fidler had no land, she was more of a townswoman. And so fair-haired Bertha sat at the window behind the tied-back curtains and crocheted, or, at the most, dawdled about in the little garden and looked after the tiny bed of vegetables. But the salad and turnips were generally overgrown with weeds, and the daughter, in a dainty apron, stood at the door, and gossiped with her mother's customers. Mrs. Fidler was much sought after, and more often away in the outlying villages than at home.

Now, when Mina was going among strangers, Bertha seemed like a friend. She pressed her hand confidently.

"I'm glad, but why didn't ye tell me before you were going to Berlin?"

The other laughed. "Didn't know it mysel'. I don't like bein' at home any more. Mother's always away, an' when she's at home, she tipples, and then she either snores or scolds. That don't suit me. And yesterday, when she was so cross, I thought: 'Ye wait a bit. She's with the Reims at Liebuch to-night, he fetched her in his cart yesterday, his wife is having her sixth child. She's well off there, an' don't hurry away. When she comes back I'm a'most in Berlin.' Haha! haha!" She broke out into her clear laugh.

"But——" stammered Mina, quite taken aback.

"She's right," growled Max approvingly.

"I've got what I want for the present," said Bertha, and touched with her foot a slovenly parcel and a cardboard box, which she had pushed under the calf. "The other rags she can keep, I don't lose much. I'll get everything new in Berlin. You'll see what a smart hat I'll have. I'll buy it with my first wages."

She held her pretty head as erect as if she already wore a Florentine hat, trimmed with white feathers.

"You're a plucked 'un," burst out Max, and looked at her admiringly.

She passed her hand lightly over his chin. "D'ye like me? that's right, boy."

He grumbled out something. It made him angry that she called him a boy. Didn't she know that he was nearly eighteen, as old as she was? He would show her what he could do. And he found her foot among the tangle of legs mixed up together in the narrow space, passed his hand over it, up her leg to her calf, which he pinched vigorously.

With a scream she fell backwards; Mina, alarmed, seized hold of her, and at the same time caught her basket, which had begun to slip.

The peasant turned round on his seat. "What's the matter?"

Mina was very angry with her brother, but Bertha laughed

loudly, it was a good joke. And now she looked at the young fellow with a roguish smile.

There was plenty to talk about ; they went over the gossip of the village. Bertha had many a good story, she saw and heard so much. Only when Obst hinted at a sweetheart she was deaf.

“As if I wanted one,” she snapped. “I know what it means—I’m not my mother’s daughter for nothing,” and she shuddered. “I’ll enjoy my life first.”

Mina looked at her without speaking, she did not even understand her. And so the last part of the way they were silent.

The sun had pierced through the fog and shone down on the fields. Far behind, amid the sunbeams, lay her native village ; it had long disappeared, but she looked back till her eyes filled with tears.

How dear, and how hard to leave, were all at once the broad fields over which the wind passed ; a resinous scent came across from the blue pine-woods. She sighed and drew in the pungent air with deep breaths. The swallows had long gone, the wires between the telegraph poles on which they used to sit in rows, one white chemisette by the side of the other, were empty. But down on the meadow, in the lowlands, stood a lonely stork, motionless, on one leg. Mina held her breath. Would he remain here? But Bertha screamed “Shoo!” reached over the peasant’s shoulder, seized the whip, and cracked it lustily. The bird spread out his wings and flew high up in the air, far away, till he was only a dark speck against the bright disk of the sun.

And so the stork didn’t stay here either. Mina yawned, she felt chilled and overtired, wretched and miserable. She had indeed scarcely slept at all. Yesterday, when the day’s work was over, she had put on her Sunday dress, and gone to the neighbours to say good-bye ; on her return she had laid aside her finery and worked till midnight, helping her mother to knead the dough, skim the milk, make the butter, chop wood, and sweep the passage. When she at last went to her room she had still some things to put in her basket, and when she got into bed, Emma, who shared it with her and was sound asleep, had taken up the

greater part of it. She heard the church clock strike every hour ; a strange mixture of joy and pain deprived her of sleep.

Pale and thoughtful she sat in the cart, seeming older than she really was.

On the other hand, you would never have taken Bertha for eighteen. She looked very young, as fresh as a wild rose and quite as pretty. Her fair hair was as glossy as silk ; she wore it combed straight back from her smooth forehead : she had only curled a few locks on the nape of her neck with the goffering irons her mother used for her caps. She gazed at the world gaily, a childlike expression in her clear, blue eyes.

The cart had now reached a higher part of the road, from where they could look down on the little town lying below—the watch-tower with its two turrets, the town-hall, and the arched bridge over the river.

Bertha started up with a cry of joy. “Look ! look ! the red house is the station ! there’s the railway ! from there we go to Berlin.” She beamed with joyful expectation ; her fair hair fluttered in the wind ; she stretched out both hands as if she would snatch at happiness.

Mina nodded without speaking.

They drove along the avenue of cherry-trees which winds through the hop plantations to the town. There were only a few shrivelled leaves left on the trees, and these would be carried away by the next gust of wind. When Mina was here last it was summer, and the farmer, who was just picking cherries, gave her several handfuls of the splendid red fruit. Her mouth watered when she thought of it. All the blood left her cheeks ; a spasm contracted her heart.

They had left the country quiet of the fields behind them ; in the barns of the suburbs they could hear the thud of the thrashing flail, which the old-fashioned peasants still used, but already intermixed with the panting of a machine. Now sparks came flying out of an open smithy. The calf was frightened, and could hardly stand on its trembling legs.

The cart-wheels rumbled over the paving-stones ; windows rattled ; the bells at the little shop-doors tinkled ; a cyclist tore by ; a bell sounded a shrill note. People stood at the side of

the road ; children ran shouting after the cart. The calf set up a terrified bleating, a miserable, animal cry for help.

“Shut up !” Peasant Obst raised his whip angrily.

Now they reached the butcher’s house at the corner, with the gutter in front full of greasy, slow-moving water ; quarters of veal, sides of bacon, sausages and plucks hung in the window. The little red curtains of the shop-door were caught by a sudden gust of wind, and blew out into the lane like greedy tongues.

With twitching ears and eyes starting out of its head, the trembling calf uttered a piercing cry, and made a wild leap ; it would have sprung from the cart if Max had not caught it in time by one leg.

“Woh, accursed beast !” screamed the peasant.

“It smells blood,” said Bertha, laughing and inflating her nostrils.

## II

ON the journey they became close friends. Mina thought she would never have got on alone ; she had never been so long in the train. It was very hot in the fourth-class compartment, the perspiration ran from her forehead. Her blue Sunday dress, which did duty summer and winter, was dreadfully tight ; to bring away all her things she had put on an every-day skirt under it. Though it had been cool in the morning, the September sun was burning at noon. The small window-panes dazzled the eyes, you could hardly see out. Innumerable motes danced in the sun-beams, the coal-dust lay thick on the floor, the seats, the passengers. Mina felt as if she must bite the air ; she could scarcely breathe.

They had left the little side line at Landsberg and crossed the bridge on the Warthe to get to the main line, where a network of rail<sup>ways</sup> stretched in all directions in inextricable confusion. Mina ran to and fro like a frightened hen. Bertha helped her to carry her travelling-basket, but soon found it too heavy ; she had to

put it down constantly to get breath. When they arrived at the station, dripping with perspiration, the train for Berlin was just steaming out of it. Mina was dismayed, Bertha laughed; it was a good opportunity to see Landsberg. But she could not prevail upon her friend to leave the platform. Upright and silent she sat for hours upon her basket, her face burning, her wide-open eyes fixed upon the distant glimmer of open country which lay beyond the rails and signal-posts.

At last, in the afternoon, they approached Berlin. Bertha, who was impatiently leaning out of the window, screamed that she could see innumerable houses as large as castles, towers too, and chimneys; Mina got very frightened. Pulling at her companion's skirt she felt for her hand, and said, "Stay with me."

Bertha nodded.

"Come wi' me to Reschkes', shall cost you nought. I ha' told you she has a registry; she'll get yer a good place too. Do come."

Bertha slapped her knee with pleasure at this proposal, she had not really known where to go. And although she had not troubled her head further about it—she had been told that everywhere on the stations were placards: "Home for girls seeking employment; situations found"—it would be better perhaps to go with her friend. And so she embraced Mina, who pressed her hand.

At the Friedrichstrasse Station they felt stunned. They were jostled, hustled, pushed, bumped, screamed at, and abused, till at last they escaped from the hurrying crowd and got down to the street. There they stood, dazed, leaning against a pier of the railway arch, and looking at the surging crowds before them.

"8, Göbenstrasse; 8, Göbenstrasse," Mina murmured continuously. Her aunt lived there, but how was she to get there? A disconsolate feeling took possession of her. Bertha, too, was rather quiet, her pretty face pale; she was tired, hungry and thirsty. The few slices of bread and cheese which Mina had faithfully shared with her on the way were not enough for two healthy appetites. Her arms ached, too, from carrying so many things; there was the cardboard box containing her greatest treasures—the pink blouse, the shining belt, the two night-jackets with broad crochet trimming, the fur boa, the jet-trimmed cape



which Peasant Freier had given her mother when his wife died in child-bed—the box was heavy, and the string round it had cut into her finger.

Nobody troubled about the two ; everybody was occupied with his own affairs. Then two young men passed, gentlemen, Bertha saw, and instinctively felt that the eyes of one rested on her with approval. Quickly she advanced : “ Can yer tell us, please, how to get to 8, Göbenstrasse ? ”

He smiled at her blushing face. “ That is a long way from here, an hour to walk. You had better ride ; here comes the omnibus. Stop ! ” He held up his arm ; the great box, drawn by two powerful horses, stopped.

It took some time before the girls were safely inside ; Mina had a struggle first with the conductor, who did not want to take her travelling-basket. An imploring look from Bertha disarmed him, and, grumbling he pushed the basket under the stairs which led to the top. Then Mina, with her egg-basket on her arm, squeezed her square-built person through the narrow door, while Bertha slipped in after her and hopped on to a seat between two young workmen. She pushed her bundle to the left, her cardboard box to the right, half on to the laps of her neighbours, and then turning round gazed uninterruptedly through the large pane of glass at her back, into the street. She did not even notice when the conductor came with the tickets. Mina had to pay for her. She had at once asked the woman sitting by her what it cost, but she did not give the tip of a halfpenny, which the other advised.

Mina did not look at the street, but kept her eyes fixed on the basket of eggs on her lap.

“ Yer a stranger 'ere, miss ? ” began the woman sitting next her, who had a thin, pale face, and hungry eyes.

She nodded.

“ Thought so, could tell it by the looks of yer ! You want a place for the first o' October ? That's a 'appy time when you've nought to look after but yer box an' chest o' drawers. A new place every month when the missus is too 'ard to please. Yus, yus,” she uttered a piteous sigh—“ now the kids is there, there's no more o' that. It's ‘ Mother, mother, ’ all day ”

The two workmen opposite, between whom Bertha was sitting, manifested interest.

"I am married too," said one—Mina had taken him for scarcely twenty. "Three years a'ready."

"When the man's got work it's all right," went on the woman. "My husban's been in 'ospital six weeks, an' now 'e's been sittin' about at 'ome a whole month. Fill 'is belly 'e can, but not work. An' my Clara, my eldest, was away a month at the 'oliday 'ome; she's back a fortnight now, an' it's the same as ever: 'eadache, weak, runnin' eyes. Lottie an' Fritz 'ave the 'ooping-cough, an' I dunno if Minnie, the little 'un, 'll pull through. The doctor, 'e said: scrof'lus, milk an' eggs, two fresh eggs every day! Where an I to git 'em from?"

The two young men laughed. "Kill a rich Jew!"

The woman did not listen to their joke. With the garrulity of the poor, who have nothing but their sufferings, she went on. "An' the rent: an' all so dear! On'y think, a shilling for fifteen eggs, an' allus some rotten among 'em!" Her hungry eyes were fixed on the girl's basket. "I'd so like to give the little 'un a few fresh eggs, on'y a few!" She bent down over Mina's basket, stretched out the thin fingers, drew them back again—now she could restrain herself no longer, she touched an egg, and then took it into her hand. "Quite fresh, ain't it?"

Mina was frightened, did the woman mean to take one? She was angry too, what had she to do with strangers? She took the egg from the woman's hand, put it with the others, and drew the cloth, which had slipped down, closer over the basket. It was a sad look the pale woman gave her, then, after a short time, she rose, sighing, and got out.

Bertha seemed to have noticed nothing, she was still gazing through the windows. When the conductor called "Bülow-strasse," her neck was quite stiff from the cramped position.

What did they call "near" here in Berlin? The way from the Bülow- to the Göbenstrasse seemed twice as far to the girls as through their whole village. Bertha kept stopping at all the shop windows. The confectioners' especially she could not pass; then her eyes sparkled and beamed, she ran her tongue over her red lips as if she tasted something sweet.

At last they came to the Göbenstrasse.

"One, two . . . six, seven, eight!" Mina counted aloud, and yet in her confusion had almost gone on farther, if Bertha had not cried "Stop!"

"Jacob Reschke. Flour and Meal. Fruit and Vegetables." These words were written in great, white letters on the lower half of the wall of the basement, which was painted a brilliant sky-blue.

High baskets stood on both sides of the wooden steps leading down to the shop. One, at the top, was full of flabby beans, the opposite one was red from the juice of crushed and burst cranberries. The window, on a level with the pavement, showed a great variety of things: cabbages, cucumbers, apples, lemons, smoked herrings, pears, plums, pickled herrings, bread, and white cheese; in the middle was a basket: "Eggs, warranted fresh."

There was no want of labels; everywhere dangled a slip of cardboard:

New Country Bread daily.

Finest Petroleum.

Preserving Vinegar.

Truck on hire.

Perleberger Blacking.

Every kind of Beer delivered free.

Mangling done.

But most conspicuous was the notice: "Registry Office for Servants. Amalie Reschke."

The steps were damp and slippery from trodden remains of vegetables. Here lay a pod, there somebody had spit out a plum-stone, here again mouldy grape-skins were lying; all the servants who went down to buy fruit tasted it on the steps. It was a very frequented shop, the whole day long the bell was going; it had been ingeniously placed under one of the steps, and jangled, and screeched, and twanged in a high, deafening treble. If Mrs. Reschke attempted to disappear behind the glass door with the yellowed curtains which led to the lodging of the family, the piercing jingle called her back immediately. Nobody could creep into the shop unnoticed, though the blue varnished doors were wide open, and only closed late in the evening, long after ten.

The girls put down their luggage at the top, and felt their way

down the dirty steps. Mina started, her heart beat violently, as under her heavy tread the hidden bell sounded. It rang sharply, as if it would never leave off, a warning, vicious, spiteful yelp. She did not dare stir, but stood there bathed in perspiration. Thank Heaven! Now it left off, Bertha had dragged her down to the bottom. It seemed quite dark down there after the light street.

Only by degrees could their eyes accustom themselves to the contrast, and distinguish objects.

A stout little woman stood behind the counter, which was packed so high with boxes and baskets, glass jars, loaves and stone pitchers that she could hardly see over it all. A light cotton apron was strained over her broad hips, the apron bib confined the ample bosom, into which she had stuck a pink aster.

"Wot can I give you?" she asked in a very friendly way, and simpered at the two girls.

"That is her," whispered Bertha, and pushed Mina forward.

"Now then, ain't lost yer tongue?"

Mina advanced hesitatingly to the counter; holding out her basket of eggs before her like a shield, she stammered, "I—I'm Mina."

"Who?"

"Heinze's Mina, from Golmütz."

"Good Lord, Heinze's Mina, from Golmütz!" The woman clasped her hands. "Why didn't you say it first? I know so many Minas. Well, that's fine that yer 'ere!" She gave her niece her hand. "I've often said to Reschke, 'Will yer bet? She don't come, she's afraid o' Berlin.'"

"Oh no!"

"Well, sit 'e down!" Her sharp glance took in Bertha's daintier figure. "Who 'ave you got wi' you?"

"A friend."

"An' so you want a place too, miss, do yer? That won't be difficult."

The woman smiled, well satisfied, and turned to the glass door. "Reschke, Reschke!"

"Let me be, I'm doin the books," a man's voice grunted from behind the door.

“Nonsense! Yer niece is 'ere. Come, 'urry up.”

“Git along wi' you!” The glass door opened, and Reschke, curious, appeared in shirt-sleeves and trodden-down slippers. With the ease of long practice he seized Bertha by the chin. “Well, my gel, you've growed famous. Nine years ago, when I visited me sister, yer weren't much to look at. But now!”

“I'm Mina, uncler,” said Mina.

“Ah—you?” It was rather drawn-out. “Yus, indeed, I should know the breed! The bones from Anne, and the nose from Heinze. Well, make yerself at home.”

“Love from father an' mother,” murmured Mina, and tried to find room on the counter for her basket of eggs. “Home-laid. An' they're all well at home. An' Mollie 'ull be confirmed at Easter.” Nobody, indeed, had asked her, but it seemed so natural to speak of her family, here, with her nearest relations. Was not the big man, with the coarse nose and kind little eyes, her mother's only brother, her pride, the Croesus, of whose good fortune she so often spoke to her children, and other people too? Mina went close up to him and gave him her hand. “Thank ye, uncler, if ye'll help me to a good place! I'd like to find my luck here too!”

“Hoho! hoho! hoho!” Reschke held his sides. “They all think money's to be picked up in the streets 'ere! You must git round my wife, my gel: the devil 'ull dance to 'er piping. Shall she make 'im dance for you too, miss?” He winked at Bertha.

“'Old yer jaw,” snapped his wife. “You knows quite well 'ow it is with service to-day; the missuses expect too much and are never satisfied with the gels. An' they're that stingy with the wages that it's a shame. But the gels will all come to Berlin, an' wot they think to find 'ere, I dunno.”

“Five, ten, twelve—one dozen!” She counted the eggs.

“Five, ten, twelve—but we'll see—two dozen!”

“Five, ten, twelve—yer needn't be afraid—three dozen!”

“Five, ten, twelve—sich a smart gel—four dozen!”

“Five, ten, twelve—it 'ud be a shame if you should git no place—five dozen!”

“Five, ten, twelve—sich a 'andsome gel, so modest, so 'ard-working! Aunt Reschke 'ull look after you.”

“Wot did I tell yer?” said her uncle, and patted her on the shoulder.

Mina beamed over her whole face; Bertha smiled to herself.

### III

BESIDES the shop, the lodging of the Reschkes consisted of the large room behind the glass door, where the cottage piano was, and the bed of the couple stood screened off by a chintz curtain; then there was a smaller room and a tiny kitchen. To the right of the best room was a low, windowless space, where potatoes and scrubbing sand were stored, and two big dogs prowled about. With them Reschke drove to market. At three o'clock in the morning you could hear him shuffling about in the court, and whistling to the dogs. Flick and Flock slunk round him while he pulled the covering from the little cart which stood in a corner of the yard; then with the end of a rope he drove them to the shaft and harnessed them. It was Reschke's ideal one day to be in possession of a superannuated cavalry horse, and then, when Sunday interrupted the daily journeys to market, to drive his family to the Grunewald in the afternoon. But he could not run to that yet. Arthur was to study, and that cost money. And so for the present he had to get on the cart and drive with the dogs to the Central Market Hall; the long-legged, lean animals raced through the quiet, dark streets as if possessed. If necessary he could be there at four o'clock. Then the bargaining began, the bidding and outbidding at the sales, the shoving and pushing among all the small tradespeople who thronged round the packed baskets brought there by the early trains. But when Reschke came home again with the loaded cart, which the dogs now dragged laboriously through the quickening bustle of the streets, he got back at once into the bed which was still agreeably warm from the portly form of his good wife, and slept till noon. The hidden bell might jangle ever so viciously, the chatter in the shop be ever so loud and lively, he snored on.

The small room had been made over to the eldest son, its low window was below the level of the court, and the draught blew all the refuse of the place against its dusty panes. Father and mother were anxiously concerned that Arthur should not be disturbed when he sat in there over his books. They had taken it into their heads that their eldest was to study. Then they would know what they had scraped and saved for when their son was a "Doctor." "'E's all there," Reschke would say; his wife had persuaded him to that, and she never failed to add, "Extraordinary clever! 'e'll bring it to somethin'!" Amalie Reschke looked upon her Arthur as a dear legacy of that "Doctor" who had lodged with them when she and her mother let rooms. "I might ha' bin 'is wife," she used to say with pride, "if 'e 'adn't died of the gallopin'!" And then she wiped away a tear. She still thought of her "Doctor," although in the last weeks of his life she had begun to "keep company" with Reschke. At that time Reschke was employed at a grocer's; with his savings, and a little money the Doctor left her they started a vegetable shop.

Gertrude, the eldest daughter, slept in the tiny kitchen; she was a shop-girl at Wertheim's. She was seventeen, and looked quite like a young lady, though she slept on the kitchen table which at night was pulled out and made into a bed, and had to wash under the tap. Her cheap, patent leather shoes and striped stockings looked dainty, and these she loved to show when she picked up her dress and sprang into the train. She was very particular about her appearance. As it was a long way to the shop, her parents gave her a season ticket for the tram-car in the winter, but she only took it for a short time; she preferred to run till she was out of breath and then with the money saved she bought a jacket of the latest fashion, poor material, and miserably thin, but "chic" in the highest degree. She was quite in love with this jacket, it made her so full in the breast, and so slender in the waist, she could not pass a shop-window without looking at herself in it. The long feather boa fluttered over her narrow hips, imitation diamonds shone in her transparent, anæmic ears, her little snub nose with the flexible nostrils tilted into the air, the pearly teeth looked very white behind the pale, rather too full lips. Every morning she got up a good half-hour earlier than was

necessary, though she would have given anything to have gone on sleeping by her sister Maggie on the kitchen table. She was always tired, but it was of no use, curling her hair took such a long time. And so with her teeth chattering, and in her short, red flannel petticoat, she knelt before the little glass which she had placed on the kitchen stove. Twenty times, thirty times, she had to put the curling-tongs into the chimney of the lamp before her hair was waved to her liking, and puffed out at the sides till the little head looked unnaturally big.

Maggie, who was twelve, was a poor little creature, whose speech one hardly understood. She had a hollow roof to her mouth, for which something could have been done if an operation, "closure of the cleft-palate" as the doctor said, had been performed in time. But the Reschkes did not trouble about such things, it cost too much money, or, at any rate, time. And so Maggie remained a ridiculous figure for her brothers and sisters; as she could only swallow slowly, in consequence of this defect, they took the best of everything from under her very nose. By degrees she almost gave up speaking, and when she could make herself better understood, she was shy. Silent and timid, she kept as much out of sight as possible; she did not dare show herself in the shop; if she did, her mother turned her out. However, with little Ella, the Reschkes could show off. She was "a sharp 'un," as Reschke used to say with a smirk; cleverer at seven than many who were double her age. She kept all the customers amused. In her thin child's voice she sang all the favourite couplets; if she had only heard one once she knew it. As the youngest she slept on the sofa in the best room, with her parents.

It had not been quite easy to find room for Mina and Bertha, for Mrs. Reschke was quite willing to keep the latter too; two-pence for sleeping, and threepence for food for each person. Mina was thunderstruck. Pay? Then they need not have gone to relations, and she had brought the basket of eggs too. In her dismay she was about to give vent to her feelings, but Bertha secretly trod on her foot, and gave her such a warning glance out of her blue, childlike eyes, that she was silent. Afterwards Bertha whispered to her: "Hold yer tongue! D'ye think I'm



going to stay here long wi' the woman? But we must be quiet now, till she've got us a good place." And Mina understood that.

Bertha was in the gayest spirits the whole evening, helped here, there, and everywhere, and let no opportunity pass of making herself useful. When the blue-varnished doors were shut, and she helped Mrs. Reschke to clear away things in the shop, she was quite enchanted with her. "That's a gel! She'll make her fortune, that's certain!"

Reschke too looked up with a satisfied smile when his wife and Bertha appeared in the sitting-room. It had been dull enough there. Arthur sat over his books, with his head between his hands and his elbows on the table; Gertrude had not come back from the shop yet; Ella was at the piano and strummed some scales which her piano-teacher had given her to practise; Maggie cowered, silent as usual, in a dark corner. Reschke yawned, he could hardly keep his eyes open; the large glass of white beer which he always emptied over his "book-keepin'" was long drained dry. He pricked up his ears enviously when he heard Bertha's clear titter in the shop, followed by his wife's fat laugh. Mina was much too moping for him; she sat bolt upright and motionless on her chair, did not move a muscle of her face, folded her hands on her lap, and said not a word. Nothing pleased her. She had thought to herself that her relations would show a little more attention to the visitor who had come from such a long way off. If they had not so much money at home, they did things better; on any especial occasion they never failed to have a dough-cake with plum-jam to it, or whey-cheese. The disappointment gave her a lump in her throat.

And the feeling of disappointment was still there, when she got into bed with Bertha on the kitchen table, by the side of which Maggie had dragged her straw mattress. Gertrude, who had drummed at the blue-varnished door three times at half-past ten—that was her signal—slept on the sofa with Ella in the best room.

Mina could not get to sleep—the musty, close air oppressed her; she pushed down the coverlet and laid her bare arms upon it. But still it was no better. And so she lay in the dark with burning, wide-open eyes, and thought she could hear drops

falling from the walls which shone so strangely in the lamplight. An alarming noise made her start ; she felt for Bertha's warm body and whispered terrified, "D'ye hear?" But the girl slept on quietly.

How it rattled and snorted and groaned ! A superstitious horror seized the waking girl, she sat up in bed and listened ; now she knew what it was—the silent Maggie was snoring. "Be still," she cried in an undertone, and rapped on the leaf of the kitchen table which was turned up to form the side of the bed. The rattling ceased and a slight rustle of the straw mattress showed that the child was awake.

A feeling of languor came over Mina, her limbs felt as if paralyzed ; the air in the room was so close and exhausted from the number of lungs that had been working in it, and now a clammy sweat broke out over her face, and spread over her whole body. For a moment her mind wandered—she thought she had got into the bog in the Golmütz Forest at home ; sticky and miry it clung to her feet and dragged her down, deeper and deeper ; a horrible, filthy, mouldy smell came from it. She would raise her arm and grasp the reeds to pull herself out, but she could not move, her arm lay stiff and as if dead on the coverlet.

Now she awoke again and was just going to cry "Thieves !" when a ray of light fell across her bed ; blinking her eyes she saw her uncle, scantily dressed and hardly able to keep on his feet for tiredness, making his way to the hearth. The ashes were still warm, and out of them he took the brown coffee-pot, and groped his way back.

And so it was morning ! This quieted her and at last her eyes closed. She slept soundly, but she had dreadful dreams ; she wearied herself in a vain struggle, could get no air in a stifling vapour. A cold finger, tickling her under her nose, awoke her. She threw out her arms and did not know where she was.

The tiny kitchen was full of people. Arthur stood at the tap and let the water run into his jug ; Ella jumped about in her chemise and played all sorts of tricks ; Gertrude, in her short petticoat, knelt before her piece of glass and curled her hair all over her head ; while Bertha, in one of her night-jackets with the crochet trimming, stood by and watched her attentively.

"You must do your hair like this too," advised Gertrude; "it's fashionable."

"That I will," said Bertha, "some day, but now," and she passed her hands over her smooth head, "this suits me quite well!"

She was right; she looked very pretty with her glossy, fair hair drawn back from her face into a mass of braids behind, which were wound round and round above the snow-white neck.

Arthur's jug ran over, the water splashed on to the floor—he had not been paying attention to it; his eyes were fixed on the pretty girl and took in all her charms.

"You fool!" screamed Gertrude. "Do take care; the water'll make my hair wet."

"Let it." Now he turned the tap on as far as ever he could, so that the water splashed on all sides.

Ella screamed with pleasure; holding out her chemise with the tips of her fingers like a ballet-dancer, she pirouetted and piped in her highest tones, "Oh Conductor, oh Conductor, what have you done to me?" This was her favourite song; she had heard it in the Winter-garden where her parents had taken her on Easter Sunday evening. The others laughed, except Mina—she was angry that she had slept so long, and wanted to get up.

"Now then, Lie-a-bed, up wi' you," cried Gertrude, and tried to pull away the coverlet. But with a scream Mina snatched it back, and looked anxiously at Arthur.

He saw her distressed face. "Now quick, I'm not going to look at you!" And he stood there with his legs wide apart.

The water splashed, the first milk and vegetable carts rattled over the paving-stones above, workmen in their heavy boots tramped past the little window. It was a terrible noise.

"Quiet," cried Bertha in the midst of all the tumult. Laughing, she seized Arthur, and before he knew what she was doing, pushed him out of the kitchen. He tried to give her a kiss, but she was too quick for him, slammed the door in his face, and turned the key in the lock.

A few minutes later somebody tried the handle from the other side.

"Who's there?"

“Now then,” Mrs. Reschke’s scolding voice was heard, “wot’s the meanin’ o’ this? It ain’t the fashion ’ere to lock the door; we’ve nothin’ to ’ide ’ere!” She was in a bad temper, Reschke had just come back and had bought abominably dear. One penny per head for white cabbage wholesale, and three shillings for a quarter of plums. When you reckoned how much went bad, how were you to make anything out of it? She shook the door furiously.

Bertha went quickly and opened it.

Mrs. Reschke was in morning dress, that is to say, in a petticoat and night-jacket. Her pendulous bosom hung down to where might have been her waist; in her slip-shod felt slippers she shuffled to the hearth. “If I were to lie a-bed so long,” she grumbled, with an irate look at Mina, who was just putting on her stockings. “Make ’aste out o’ ’ere! Ella, my darlin’, lie down in papa’s bed a bit. If I’d known they’d make such a ’ullabaloo!”

She rattled the iron rings on the hearth stormily, raked about in the ashes for any sparks that might be there, and put on a great tin saucepan of water.

“Mina, when you’re dressed, go through where uncle is sleepin’, but softly. An’ to the right into the cellar. Fetch the wash-tub from there, it stands wi’ the taters. An’ I’ll put in Ella’s white frocks to soak for yer, an’ Gertie’s embroidery petticoat, an’ Arthur’s flannel shirt an’ stockin’s an’ ’andkerchiefs, an’ a few other little things. It must all be ready by Sunday. Now then, why d’yer stand there like a graven image? Quick, quick, you’ll wonder at what yer ’ave to do when yer gits a place!”

Mina indeed stood as if she were turned to stone. Was that the same woman who had smirked behind the counter yesterday, and had asked in such an insinuating way, “Wot can I give you?”

“I’ll go,” said Bertha, always ready to oblige, and slipped out of the kitchen.

She found Ella in the best room turning out the pockets of her father’s coat and trousers, which were thrown over a chair, to see if a penny or halfpenny had not been left in one of the corners; her father was snoring heavily behind the curtain. When she saw Bertha she laughed slyly. “’E won’t wake up!”

And then she added in her precocious way, "Not all day! 'E's been tipplin'!"

While Mina stood at the hearth the whole morning in the close kitchen, rendered still closer by the steam of the boiling soap-suds, and rubbed her hands sore on the dirty washing of the whole family, Bertha waited on the customers in the shop. Mrs. Reschke had on her business air again—cheerful, friendly, well-disposed to everybody.

"Wot can I give you, Miss Theresa?" she asked, and then clapped her hands with delight. "Why, you do your 'air different, an' don't it suit you fine!"

A thin, elderly person, with an aquiline nose, had entered the shop. She wore her hair twisted round in a knot which stood out at the back of her head, in front she had combed a quantity of little curls high up over her forehead.

"That do suit yer. You look sixteen."

The woman smiled, much flattered, and asked for a pound of salt and some parsley.

Mrs. Reschke went on chattering while she weighed the salt and divided a large bunch of parsley standing in water.

"There's nought to be made out o' parsley, nought at all. I'd not let anybody else 'ave it under a penny. An' it's quite fresh, stood in the garden this mornin'. But I must keep lookin' at yer 'air; 'ow it becomes you! Wot can I give you besides? Plums or cabbage? Dirt cheap to-day, my 'usband bought to sich advantage. Cabbage, a penny or three-halfpence a head; can I give yer one?"

"No, thank you," said the cook. "They want to have some of the new Rhine sauerkraut with sausages to-day."

"My gracious! That's too rich for your delicate stomach, Miss Theresa!"

"Well, then, give me a cabbage!" The woman looked them over, picked one out, and weighed it in her hand. "Wot's the price?"

"Twopence halfpenny."

"Wot?"

"Yes, it's a very large 'un; a regular whopper!"

"Three-halfpence!"

"Three-halfpence? No, my dear, it costs us more than that."

The servant pursed up her lips. "Tell that to somebody else; I'll go across to the grocer's. A pound of new sauerkraut only costs a penny."

"Yer won't do that? That's yer fun, Miss Theresa. You're not goin' to take away yer custom? As it is I often see yer at the grocer's opposite. As true as I stand here, I don't earn nought on it, not a stiver; but as it's for you—there!" With a sigh she let the cabbage fall into the girl's basket. "Yer shan't say Mrs. Reschke weren't obligin', though I don't make sich a parade as the grocer opposite." She turned the girl round and round. "But the way yer do your 'air do suit yer beautiful! You looks like a lady, a lady out of a fashion-book."

"Like an old owl," she grumbled after her disappearing customer. "Three-halfpence, only three-halfpence! An', in course, she tells 'er missus it cost twopence. The bag o' bones! I'll owe 'er one for that."

But a new buyer had scarcely appeared on the cellar steps, when her face cleared like magic. There was again the same insinuating voice, "Wot can I give you?"

Bertha enjoyed herself immensely.

The busiest time was at eight, and from half-past nine till twelve o'clock, when the shop was like a dovecot with its perpetual coming and going. One fetched potatoes, another vegetables, a third petroleum, a fourth herrings, a fifth fruit. Every one felt the pears to see if they were ripe, all tasted the plums, which stood in a high basket at the entrance to the cellar.

No fruit was safe where the anæmic Mary was; she even bit into the greenest apples. She put her hand into the two large glass jars on the counter—one held coffee-berries, the other peas. But one had to let it pass unnoticed, for her mistress always bought of the best—in spring, the first asparagus; in autumn, the first grapes.

"Well, Polly," began Mrs. Reschke affably, "'ave yer tasted the plums? Good, arn't they? take some more! Tell yer missus they're splendid for preservin'. And 'ere, you must try the grapes! Summat extra fine for the master! But yer cough? I must gi' you some of the new cough lozenges; take another,

don't be shy, they'll do yer good! An' don't forget to tell yer missus of the preservin' plums and the grapes." She put a handful of lozenges into the girl's basket.

Bertha's eyes sparkled. Longingly and enviously she watched Mary push one sweet after the other between her pale lips, and, luxuriously sucking, go on gossiping with Mrs. Reschke. Bertha licked her lips too, she could hardly bear it any longer; she was excessively fond of sweets—as a child she had stood for hours at the door of the grocer's shop in the village till the good-natured man, not able to resist the quiet importunity of her gaze, had given her a piece of sugar.

Others came. Handsome Augusta, so proud, so respectable, that every one else felt shy. She made her purchases with quiet dignity; in her freshly starched, pink cotton dress, white cap and dazzling apron, she was the picture of cleanliness. She bought a quantity of things and had everything entered into a book; Bertha's sharp eyes saw that Mrs. Reschke wrote everything down a penny or twopence dearer than the price. And Augusta looked over her shoulder the whole time and occasionally dictated.

When Augusta had gone, Mrs. Reschke was loud in her praise. That was a respectable girl! It was she who had got her her present place with young married people who had everything new, and could not praise their handsome, staid Augusta enough.

Then came Matilda, who was general servant at Captain von Saldern's. Her round face had certainly been very handsome in her youth; now it had an extremely good-natured, but at the same time, absent expression. She had tears in her eyes when she spoke of being obliged to leave her place on the first of October; she had been there nearly two years. "And I like the missus," she went on in her pleasant, rather husky voice, "I shouldn't ha' gone, if I hadn't meant to marry."

"Wish yer joy," called out Mrs. Reschke, who was just then serving two other customers and winked at them. "Will it be soon?"

"Not yet," said Matilda mysteriously.

The young girls, who stood about with their market-baskets on their arms, nudged one another.

“I asked my fortune-book at midnight, and that said, ‘There’ll soon be a wedding.’ An’ when I went to Sacrament last Sunday week, in my black silk, which I had had made for my wedding, I met Mrs. Schuster, who lives next my brother-in-law, and she told me that my sister was ill of influenza. An’ so my book is right. My sister’ll die, an’ there’ll be a wedding soon after.”

“Is she dead, then?” said one of the girls pertly.

Matilda’s face did not change. “Not yet,” said her pleasant voice. “I always ask Mrs. Schuster, for I don’t go to my brother-in-law’s house. An’ in the church, at Sacrament, I prayed to the good Lord from my heart, if a woman comes to the altar first, then she’ll live; but if a man comes first, she’ll die. Well, an’ there came a man first.”

The servants giggled; they knew poor old Matilda’s fixed idea, she was still waiting for the man who had once deserted her for the sake of her younger sister.

They laughed without restraint, when Matilda now, in the joy of her heart, invited them all to her wedding.

“An’ wot does yer missus say?” asked Mrs. Reschke. “She’ll be in a nice fix; she won’t find one so easy. Little to eat, an’ them owdacious children!”

“Ah!” Matilda blew her nose violently. “‘Matilda,’ she said to me, ‘I don’t like to let you go.’ ‘Ma’am,’ I said, ‘I enter the holy state o’ matrimony.’ ‘Ah, then,’ said she, ‘that is different, I wish you much happiness!’ But I could see how sorry she was. An’ then she called the children an’ she said, ‘Children,’ she said, ‘Matilda is going.’ Ah, an’ then the children came into the kitchen an’ they hung to my skirts an’ they begged, ‘Stay with us, Matilda!’ Oh dear, oh dear, my heart ached. ‘But no,’ I said, ‘the book has spoken!’”

“Then we shall all go to a gay weddin’ soon,” said Mrs. Reschke, quite seriously. “I shall keep yer to yer word.”

The girls were bursting with laughter.

Matilda noticed nothing of the general hilarity! Without losing her absent expression, she bought some cheap vegetables, and then dreamily mounted the cellar steps. A peal of laughter followed her.



"It's enough to kill one," said a pale, very fair girl, with a dissipated look.

It was Minnie, the servant of a bachelor, Doctor Ehrlich, for whom she cooked very well, and also answered the door during his consultation hours. The rest of the time, when the doctor was out seeing his patients, she took a walk. Last spring she had turned up in the Göbenstrasse—it was whispered, direct from the Maternity Hospital—very poorly and badly dressed. Now she wore patent leather shoes and looked very smart. "Like a fine lady," the others said enviously.

Minnie could not get over the stupidity of the woman.

"Wot can yer expect?" Mrs. Reschke shrugged her shoulders compassionately and contemptuously. "Every one ain't so sharp as you. An' she comes from East Prussia. Else she wouldn't have stayed two years in 'er place. But, good gracious me, it might do for my niece."

Just then two legs in linen trousers went past the entrance to the cellar, and as fast as her stoutness would allow she ran up the steps. "Peters, hist!"

The captain's soldier-servant, who was creeping along by the wall, with a pair of his master's boots under his arm which he was taking to be mended, turned round at once. He guessed there would be a bottle of white beer for him or a piece of cheese.

"Peters, I want a word with yer!" Mrs. Reschke drew him into a corner of the cellar and talked to him very impressively.

"That one?" he said, and pointed over his shoulder with his thumb at Bertha. "Good-looking gel."

"Ain't for you! But my niece is a nice gel too."

"Must see 'er first," grinned the fellow cunningly. "We don't buy a pig in a poke."

"Ah! seein'," said Mrs. Reschke angrily. "If I say she'll do for yer, she'll do."

"Hoho! Mother Reschke, you think you're goin' to palm me off with an old 'ag like the last! Couldn't even make dumplin's. An' 'er puddin's," he passed the back of his hand over his mouth—"Faugh!"

"Be sensible, Peters," she slipped a piece of cheese into his

hand and filled his pockets with plums. "I know that you 'ave eyes for everythin', an' I'm not goin' to serve yer bad. Tell your madam—but yer must do it at the right moment—that there's a gel 'ere as 'ud ust suit 'er: strong, 'ardworking, clean, an' very modest. She thinks a lot o' wot yer says, an' the 'ole street knows 'ow the captain esteems yer. Yer shan't lose by it." All this time the hidden bell had been ringing continuously, hoarsely, as if worn out with the exertion, but it did not give up; sometimes it uttered a shrill, discordant note, and then went on all the louder, all the more piercingly.

"My goodness, the noise!" groaned Mrs. Reschke, and put her fingers in her ears. It was nearly twelve, and she was quite exhausted and wearied from perpetual talking, persuading, bargaining and gossiping. With a loud "Ouf!" she sank on to an inverted tub. What a morning it had been! She had talked till her mouth ached, and for a root o' parsley and a handful of potatoes. She complained bitterly of the miserable vegetable shop, where you made scarcely enough for dry bread, and enviously compared it with the grocer's on the opposite side of the road.

#### IV

THE Kirchbachstrasse branches off from 8, Göbenstrasse. At the left-hand corner was Hermann Handke the grocer's wholesale and retail shop; at the right-hand corner was a public-house.

When the Reschkes stood at their cellar door they could look down the whole length of the Kirchbachstrasse with its two tall, straight rows of five-storeyed houses, outlined against the narrow strip of sky above. Any number of the lower classes who never had any supplies in the house lived in these barracks with their small courts; Handke's shop-door was opening and shutting the whole day long! Children who could hardly walk dragged along baskets and carried paper bags, everything was fetched separately for dinner and supper, every pound of flour, every

grain of salt. Not only in the morning, but from early till late, there was a perpetual coming and going in the corner shop.

In the evening, after work was over, and especially at the close of the week, the public-house at the corner was a serious rival. Old and young men, in blouses and coats, factory workmen and artisans, industrious and lazy, sober and half-intoxicated, streamed in. The children too trotted backwards and forwards with bottles and jugs, glasses large and small, holding them out carefully before them, and screwing up their noses as they sniffed the contents.

It was like a swarm of bees in the narrow space before the bar; a heavy vapour lay over the people, the bare wooden tables, the strong chairs and the spilt dregs of the liquids. The paper on the wall above the benches was quite shiny from all the greasy heads that had rested there. The men of the Göben- and Kirchbachstrasse, who lived in the back houses from the top near the sky down to the cellars in the depths of the earth, sat and stood about. Whether the sultry summer night brooded over the houses, or the winter wind howled through the streets, there they remained till the pale morning came. They talked politics, carped and cavilled, reviled and laughed, praised to the skies, cursed, struck on the table with their fists, and spat on the floor. The farther the night advanced the louder was the conversation.

"It's a shame," grumbled Reschke enviously, when he drove away with his dogs in the grey dawn, and the light still burned behind the public-house window opposite. He was one of the few in the street who never went there. He was not going to carry over his money to that fellow, who, as it was, earned too much!

This afternoon, after he had drunk his glass of white beer over his book-keeping, he had a wish for some peppermint, and sent Bertha over with a little bottle to fetch it.

She entered the public-house, and her gaze was at once arrested by the bottles in the bar; filled with different liquids, crystal-clear, green, red and yellow, they shone temptingly in the sun. Her little pointed tongue passed quickly over her lips—"Sweet liqueur—Ah!"

With her pleasantest smile she asked for the peppermint. The

landlord, whose eyes were puffy and tired—he always had his sleep out by day—filled the little bottle but did not return it ; resting his arm on the table in the bar he leant on it and looked at her approvingly. “ You’ll be the young gel from the vegetable shop opposite. I ’eard as ’ow Reschkes ’ad a niece to visit ’em.”

“ I’m not the niece, on’y a friend.”

“ Ah ! might ha’ thought you didn’t belong to that family ! Vegetables—— ! ” He turned up his red, swollen nose contemptuously, and raised his shoulders. “ Now they put up : ‘ all kinds o’ beer ! ’ It’s ridic’lous ! I wouldn’t wash my legs with the stale stuff they sell over there. Well, miss, d’you mean to stay long ? ”

She shrugged her shoulders. “ Don’t know.”

“ You’re lookin’ for a place, eh ? Well, miss, what d’ye say to a little pick-me-up, a bitter or a sweet ? ”

“ Sweet,” she said, quite abashed, and looked on with sparkling eyes while he took the cork out of a large bottle with brilliant ruby-red contents, and then filled up a little glass for her to the brim.

“ Yer health ! ”

First she sipped it, and then closing her eyes swallowed the whole at a draught, giving herself a shake after out of pure delight—sweet as sugar !

“ Like it ? ”

She nodded beaming.

He complimented her on her red cheeks, her white teeth, her fair hair, and finally proposed she should enter his service. “ I’m not married, so there’s no missus for you to be afraid of ; seven guineas a year wages, not to reckon tips, ain’t to be sniffed at either. An’ well treated you’d be,” he gave her a long look, “ that I’ll stan’ for.”

He urged her to decide at once, but the little glass of liqueur had not gone so much to her head as all that, she did not say yes or no. The thought of such sweet liqueur every day was very tempting ; seven guineas too, but she would get that elsewhere, and—no, the place was not good enough, she could look higher. She got away quickly.

In the mean time on the other side of the road Mina had been called into the shop. The whole day long she had washed in the

kitchen by a miserable, smoking lamp ; the light that fell through the little window giving on to the street was not sufficient. Many sad thoughts had come to her as she looked up at the grimy walls. No sky, no sun. At home they were working in the open fields—she fetched a deep breath—she had never been so hot there under the most broiling sun. In despair she tore off her bodice, slipped down her skirt, and went on washing in petticoat and bare arms.

She frowned angrily, her chest heaved ; if they knew at home how she was treated here ! But no, they should hear nothing, she was too proud for that ; she would not complain ! And she clenched her teeth, drove back her tears, and began to wash again furiously.

“That’ll never be white,” said Bertha, who had looked into the kitchen. “Finish it off ; why d’ye slave so ?”

“It must be white !” She bent deep over the tub and rubbed till her muscles swelled and her strong arms became blue-red. The soapsuds splattered about, flew on to her hair and there dispersed slowly. The water running down her burning forehead was pleasant ; the hard work gradually calmed her. Silent Maggie crept into the kitchen, stood by her, and stared with dull eyes into the lather of soap, which became visibly dirtier and dirtier. When Mina addressed her she started frightened and abashed, and her sickly face turned a dark red.

“Been to school ?” Mina thought of her little sister Emma when she asked, “Have you got a doll ?”

The child shook her head.

“Don’t yer like ’em ?”

Maggie looked as if she had quite drawn back into her shell ; she glanced round shyly and then brought out, “Twelve !”

“What, twelve dolls ?”

The child shook her head again for “No,” and pointed with her forefinger to herself : “Twelve years !”

Now Mina understood ! Of course, she was twelve, too old for dolls ! Emma indeed, at home, was only eight, but what a different girl she was ! Filled with compassion she passed her soapy hand over the child’s lifeless hair.

“Yer shall come an’ stay wi’ us, Maggie ; yer’ll get fat there !” And seized with an insuppressible longing she told the silent child

about her father's house with the thatched roof, where the stork built every spring, about the calceolarias at her bedroom window, the pigsty, the fowls on the dung-heap, the village with the duck-pond, the potato patch and the field of rye. The dark cellar walls vanished, she looked far away over sunny meadows.

Maggie listened with bated breath and an expression of astonishment in her tired eyes : she had never seen sprouting seed or a waving corn-field.

"It's fine—at the Zoo too," she brought out painfully and nasally.

Mina laughed scornfully. "But at home, yer should see that ! An' bread and butter"—she showed four fingers—"as thick as that ! They've a good time there !"

Maggie pressed up against her cousin. "Will yer—take—me ?"

"Yes, an' we'll eat cake. D'yer like it better wi' jam or curds ? An' the plums don't cost anything, we pick 'em up, an'——"

"Mina, you're to come into the shop," came Ella's thin voice.

Pulling open the door, she put in her head with a piece of sky-blue ribbon round it.

"There's some one there who'll engage yer."

Home in an instant was far away !

Excitedly Mina tore off her wet apron and dried her swollen, red arms ; her hands were in such a state from washing that she could hardly hook her dress. She could not even make herself a little tidy. Ella kept on—

"Make haste, or she'll go—quick, quick !"

And so in her wet pattens she clattered into the shop.

Mrs. Reschke was standing before Mrs. von Saldern in a respectful attitude ; with her sweetest smile, in a submissive voice, but with terrifying volubility, she praised the virtues of the country girl.

"Just what you want, ma'am. As strong as an ox, an' as gentle as a angel. An' 'ardworkin' ! Come along, come," she encouraged Mina, who had stopped at the door, "you've no cause to be shy, work don't shame. She took the wash in 'and at once, ma'am ; I said, 'Mina, it'll be too much for yer !' 'Aunt,' she said, 'let me be, I must 'ave work, I can't live wi'out

it!' Take my word, ma'am, you'll get a respectable gel, not a gadder-about like the others. My goodness, what are they all like, now-a-days!"

Mrs. von Saldern, a tall, delicate, fair woman with a slight stoop, and a poor carriage, stood there quite overwhelmed with the woman's flow of words. Now she raised her eyeglass to her pale-blue, tired eyes, and looked at the girl who stood awkwardly before her gazing on the floor, her feet turned in, her hair untidy, and poorly dressed.

"Is she clean? Does she understand her work?" she asked anxiously. "Peters told me she was so competent."

"I should think so!" Mrs. Reschke smiled complacently. "I ain't afraid for her, she'll get on anywhere. Give 'er a few days, an' then you'll see."

"But can she cook?"

Mrs. Reschke cleared her throat. "That shan't stand in the way. In the country they live simple, soup an' meat an' vegetables an' taters every day; on a Sunday there's summat more, a chicken or a puddin'. But fine cookin', ma'am, as it is in your 'ouse, she'll soon learn."

"I can't cook," put in Mina anxiously.

Her aunt gave her an irate look, but the insinuating voice went on: "There, ma'am, yer see 'ow modest she is! It is right to be modest; I say to my children every day, 'Be modest, yer must be so, in yer position!' But Mina goes too far."

At this moment Bertha came in. The little bottle of liqueur was hidden away under her white apron; the pink blouse, which she had put on in the afternoon to make a good impression on the customers, sat daintily on her pretty figure. Her cheeks were rosier than ever, she was pleasantly excited. Just when she left the public-house the grocer's wife at the other corner had called to her, a substantial lady with a gold chain, and a coronet of hair, held up by a high tortoise-shell comb. She too had heard that two girls, fresh from the country, had come to the Reschkes' opposite. She invited Bertha to enter the shop where loaves of sugar and great blocks of chocolate were ranged, and on a stand by the door various tall glasses filled with sweets of every possible shape and colour. Then she proposed to her to enter her service

on the first of October for twelve pounds a year wages, and thirty shillings as a Christmas present. Bertha's head went round, but she begged for time to consider; after all it was only a grocer's shop! And she looked down smilingly at herself and pulled the belt with the shining buckle a little tighter round her waist—what a girl she must be, when they all wanted to have her so!

She beamed at the strange lady in her friendliest manner, as she passed her now in the cellar and made her way dexterously through the baskets of fruit.

Mrs. von Saldern looked through her glasses at her and then took courage. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Reschke, but that seems to me much more the girl our man spoke of. Are you looking for a place?" she turned to Bertha.

"Yes, ma'am." Bertha had an open, childlike smile, which made a good impression at once.

"Do you understand cooking and housework?"

"I kept house for my mother, an' we had very much to do. I did it all alone, my mother did not look after anything."

Mrs. Reschke was speechless—*she* knew how to recommend herself! She could not help some admiration for her, but it was mixed with considerable annoyance, that this pert thing did not seem to want her help at all! "Bertha," she said sharply, "Mrs. von Saldern is thinkin' of takin' our Mina."

"Oh, I don't know—I think I would rather not," said the young wife hesitatingly, and looked undecidedly at Mina, who with her awkward manners and cross expression, contrasted very unfavourably with Bertha.

Von Saldern—Captain von Saldern! That was something genteel! Bertha's smile became more and more winning.

"She is so pleasant-looking," said Mrs. von Saldern to Mrs. Reschke as if excusing herself. "I like to have pleasant people about me."

And then turning to Bertha with sudden resolution, "I will give you twelve pounds a year."

Mrs. Reschke turned purple. Only with trouble she preserved the tone and manners of a respectful, worthy woman. Better and better! Mina, whom it was so hard to find a place for—even Mrs. von Saldern would not have her—remained on her hands,



and this jade found one at once! But she was quite pleased that the little creature should just happen upon this miserable house, where there was nothing to eat. And so in mischievous and secret delight she encouraged the young wife in her favourable opinion of Bertha.

But the wages were a difficulty. In her most modest manner Bertha asked for fourteen pounds a year, and remarked quite casually that the landlord at the public-house opposite had offered her the same, and the grocer's wife, at the other corner of the Kirchbachstrasse, even fifteen shillings more.

Mrs. Reschke trembled with inward rage—the wretches! They not only snapped up her customers, but they ruined her registry business, which she made a few shillings by. The police ought to know of this dirty trick! To engage the girls behind her back!

But this time she intended to have her money. And so she talked on. "Give her fourteen pounds, ma'am, you won't find any gel that suits better. Don't she always look as if she came out o' a bandbox! An' so quick, it's not to be believed! Bertha, you do 'ave luck to git such a place! The gels is always comin' an' askin', 'No chance of gettin' to Mrs. von Saldern?' But, lor'! I wouldn't send any o' them to you, ma'am! I know who I've got to deal with, an' it 'ud go again my conscience. 'Wot,' I says to the gels, 'yer want ter complain o' yer missus? Yer oughter be ashamed o' yourselves.' Is that right to dress as they does? An' wear a fringe, an' go dancin' every fortnight. An' brag, an' be so lazy over their work! An' what they expects—there's no end to it!"

"Yes," sighed the young wife; "I have had some very bad experiences."

"Wot sort o' a servant was Matilda?" inquired Mrs. Reschke curiously.

"A very steady person. I should certainly not have given her notice, but she is going to marry."

"There's a gel for yer!" Mrs. Reschke clasped her hands. "She's not goin' to marry! No, ma'am, don't yer believe that. She'll take another place, where she gits fifteen pounds a year. She ain't goin' any more for ten. An' she ain't goin' on the

fourth floor either! No, no, it must be in the Tiergarten, an' on the first floor! I knows the breed!"

Mrs. Reschke had talked herself warm; she did not interrupt her flow of words till Mrs. von Saldern, quite crushed by the base behaviour of her Matilda, had promised Bertha fourteen pounds per annum. When the lady had gone, Mina, who had been standing in a corner in sullen silence, began to weep. All the accumulated anger and vexation of the day found vent in these tears; home-sickness caused them too. She reproached her aunt rudely, and she, indignant at such ingratitude, screamed something about a "clownish peasant wench" for whom she would not lift her little finger, and deeply offended, banged the glass door behind her.

In the dark shop Mina cowered on the inverted tub, and covered her eyes with her hands. Bertha stood before her; the last ray of light which fell into the cellar lingered on her winsome face.

"Don't 'e cry, Mina," she said coaxingly, and passed her hand over the sobbing girl's hair. "Why do yer trouble about her! She's an old dragon, she is! Listen, I've a fine place for yer, opposite, wi' the gentleman that has the public-house!"

"Do he give fourteen pounds, did yer say?" Mina left off crying.

"No!" Bertha laughed loudly. "What are yer thinkin' of? I on'y said that to the lady. But he'll give yer eight. Go across to him now!"

"Come wi' me," said Mina, and seized her hand.

"Come along then!" Bertha wanted to pull her up from her seat, but Mina, with sudden recollection, screamed—

"The wash! I must git that ready first!"

Bertha looked after her and shook her head as she ran through the rapidly gathering darkness into the kitchen. A pitying and contemptuous smile played round her pretty mouth.

## V

EVERY evening after nine there was a great gathering in the shop, where the smell of earthy roots, of mildew and decay, mingled with the different odours of herrings, onions and rotting fruit.

They squatted gossiping on barrels and baskets, dipped in a finger here and there, tasted this and that, examined each other's clothes and way of doing the hair, boasted and swaggered. The masters and mistresses were pulled to pieces like flax which is drawn through the sharp teeth of the flax-comb. One mistress was too severe, the other too indulgent; one slovenly, another stingy; another fond of dainties, nothing good enough for the dining-room, and everything too dear for the servants in the kitchen. This madam was a shrew, and her husband an ass; the second madam too fond of dress, the third a hypocrite, the fourth stupid, the fifth pleasure-hunting, the sixth had a lover and the master ran after the servant-maid. And so it went on without end. There was constant envy in all these hearts beating under the servant's gown; a gloomy, unconscious but unquenchable rancour had taken root there. Always to serve! Always to obey when they commanded; only to be one's own mistress once a fortnight, to be able to enjoy then without restraint as they did every day.

Those were embers that glowed down in the dark cellar. They smouldered slowly, dangerously, perpetually, only now and then a gust of wind found its way in, and then the flames blazed up and set new places on fire.

The girls all screamed with indignation when one of them related an especially terrible story. How could one submit to such a thing! Only on account of a burnt soup! A deafening noise arose, a chattering and jabbering, a wild confusion of complaining, mocking, and threatening expressions, scornful laughter and angry abuse. And all the time the great mangle in the background was turning with a hollow rattling, creaking sound, as if it went against the grain to mangle the linen and damask of such masters and mistresses. And in the middle of the noise

Ella raised her thin voice and tried to drown everything with her shrill singing. She sat on the counter and dangled her legs.

“Ah, at the Tivoli,  
What have I not seen and heard——”

They were all forced to laugh. They crowded round the musical genius, caressed and admired her.

“Ella, pet! sing that about the bee-hive.”

“No, not that, Ella; there ain’t nothin’ in that! Sing ‘Ernest, Ernest, what have you taught me!’”

“No, no! ‘My first was Tony, my second was Fritz!’”

“Wot are yer thinkin’ of, sing ‘Riddeldideldi, the fat one!’”

“Ella, now then, Ella!”

It was Ella here and Ella there! Everybody wanted something different.

At last Ella stood upon the counter with her hands against her sides, the stereotype smile of the music-hall singer on her cunning, child’s face, swayed to and fro, and rattled off some piece of her repertoire, while the listeners shrieked with delight.

When Mother Reschke promised her youngest sweets then she consented to accompany her singing with gestures. But then they lost all command of themselves, they almost died of laughter. What a child that was! Mother Reschke beamed with maternal pride. Mr. Reschke, who was stumbling about among the servants, now seizing one under the chin, now another—not that it gave him pleasure, it was business—lifted his talented little daughter from the counter, and, smiling, fondly kissed her on the forehead.

That was the school to which the two country girls went.

It made no further impression on Mina—“a dull ‘un,” the Berlin girls called her; she laughed indeed when the others laughed, but when it got too loud in the shop and the jokes too wild she felt uncomfortable; she had an uneasy feeling as if a joke could be aimed at her. Then she stole out into the dark kitchen—for economical reasons no light was allowed there—and sat down by Maggie, who cowered on a bench by the hearth and gazed into the dying embers with heavy eyes.

The two girls sat with their arms round each other’s waists.

The neglected child, like thirsty land grateful for refreshing rain, eagerly drank in Mina's friendship. Maggie was quite contented, and her sad eyes lit up happily if she might only sit by her cousin. Then she stroked her apron up and down with her thin fingers, and in this movement lay all her dumb, shy tenderness.

And Mina, who felt as if she were being carried round in a whirlpool, who could not sleep at night for the rattling of the carriage wheels up in the street and the trampling of feet over her head, and in whose heart was a gnawing feeling of home-sickness, took more notice of the silent child than she would otherwise have done.

It was the last evening before Mina went to her place. The landlord of the public-house opposite had gone up to nine pounds; the wages were good, but she had to pay half of her old-age insurance money herself. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry; she had taken her basket over in the afternoon, and put it in the garret where she was to sleep, and now she would spend the last night in the cellar. Suddenly Maggie whispered into her ear—when she breathed her words as now, they lost the disagreeable palatal sound and became more intelligible—“Mina, Mina!”

“What is it?”

“I've seen the golden 'ome an' the glorious land—come, let's go there!”

“What d'ye mean? Where? Don't understand yer.”

“There,” said Maggie earnestly, and raised her pale face, upon which the firelight cast a spectral glow, to the dark ceiling of the kitchen. “Don't yer know where the golden 'ome is?”

“‘There at the beautiful pearly door,  
Where Jesus waiting stands before.’”

“What are yer talkin' of? What's the matter?” Mina felt inclined to laugh, but a certain shyness caused by Maggie's seriousness prevented her.

“Haven't yer seen 'er in the blue dress an' black poke bonnet? 'Er as carries out the papers? She took me with 'er t'other day. It's in the Bahnstrasse, in the court, the 'ouse at the back! When

you're gone I'll go there every Sunday, an' evenin's too in the week, nobody 'll miss me 'ere. An' there they sing an' every one who likes can speak. An' they cry 'Hallelujah!' An' they're glad an' clap their hands. Oh, I understand it all! Nobody laughs at me there. If mother turns me out of the shop 'ere I can get in the front row there. I can become an officer if Jesus washes me white!"

"Yer crazy," burst out Mina.

The excited girl pressed her hand convulsively—

"Tell it Jesus, tell it Jesus,  
He's a Friend well known to thee,  
Such Friend an' Brother hast thou never.  
Tell it Jesus, Jesus alone."

"Now," said Mina, "yer leaves off, you're goin' on too mad!"

But Maggie would not let her go, she clasped her weak arms round the impatient girl. "You shan't go to hell; save yer soul, save yer soul!" She had never spoken so much. In her strange tones, breathless, scarcely to be understood in her trembling anxiety to communicate her feelings to some one, she told her cousin of her secret delight.

She described the hall with staring placards on the walls, the letters a hand's-breadth high, and on blood-red ground: "Where are you going to—Heaven or Hell?" "You must die!" "Save your soul!" "Salvation is there for all!" "Jesus loves thee!" Men and women, as with one voice, sang resounding hymns there; they sang in time, like soldiers marching, you could hardly keep your feet still.

"See the banner of Salvation,  
Waving in the wind,  
Onward ever, God's own people  
Victory soon shall find."

"Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"—Maggie pronounced the word with mysterious importance as if it were a charm she was conjuring with. "You shan't go away, Mina, without knowin' about it. You're always kind to me, you shall come there too."

"Pack o' nonsense." Mina released herself roughly, but afterwards when she lay in her bed on the kitchen table, and could not fall asleep at once, she thought of Margaret's story again.

She was cross with the stupid child—what had they put into her head? About a starry crown and a golden throne, a pearly door and a happy valley. Who was going to believe all that! It was much more sensible to work hard and earn a good deal of money, then you were sure to have a good time. And Mina resolved to buckle to and prepare a heaven for herself in this way. Smiling to herself well pleased she fell asleep.

A drumming repeated again and again on the blue-varnished door soon woke her. Was not Gertrude at home yet? It must be nearly midnight. Now she heard Gertrude's voice in the street, it sounded rather frightened: "Open the door! Do open the door!" Mina was just going to get up when she heard the bedstead creak in the best room, a yawning and snorting; her aunt had roused herself. Now she shuffled through the shop to the door.

"Now then, wher've ye been so long?" she growled.

"Mother, do open the door! It's late, I couldn't help it."

The door was opened with a clatter and again shut.

"D'ye think you're goin' to make me believe yer was so late in the shop? I ain't so stupid!"

"But I was! The manager kept us there so long, we had to take stock, it's the last of the month to-day. An' I lost the first tram, it went off under my very nose, an' the second that came was full, an' the omnibus too. An' I had to walk the whole way."

"Haha! who's goin' to believe that?"

"Go there an' ask!"

"I'd like to see myself do that. Should git well laughed at for my pains! Go in to yer father, he'll teach you to come 'ome at twelve. You've bin about the streets, an' the Lord knows who with! I can see it by yer eyes that you've bin carryin' on with some 'un. What does yer look like—just as if some 'un 'ad bin a-squeeging of you! I tell ye if yer throws yerself away, you'll git what-for. We 'aven't sent yer to the 'Igh School an' kept yer there till yer'd been through the third class for yer to be'ave in this way. An' now, once for all, if the young man ain't respectable, with a bit o' money, or at least a chance of a pension when he can't work, then yer can fend for yerself—yer baggage!"

Gertrude wept. "I haven't been about the streets, mother, as true as I live!"

"Be off in to father!"

"Do ask the manager, mother, do go an' ask him!"

"Look 'ere! You're quite cracked, arn't yer? Where am I to git the time from? I knows what I knows. You've never come 'ome at eleven, 'ave ye?"

"Then I'd gone for a walk with another girl. I wanted some fresh air so badly!"

"Well, did I say a word about it? But to come at twelve, an' to wake us out o' our first sleep, is too owdacious. There's no need to cry now, yer can cry afterwards, when you've got yer box on the ears from father!"

"Do believe me, mother!" It sounded like a scream. Mrs. Reschke laughed angrily. Mina heard the glass door banged, and then the murmur of Mr. and Mrs. Reschke's voices in the best room, both talking together. Ella's thin treble piped between. There was not a sound from Gertrude, she had given up defending herself.

"Have yer heard?" whispered Bertha, who was awake too, and nudged Mina giggling. "Gertie's catching it!"

From Maggie's straw mattress came a deep sigh.

"Go to sleep, Maggie," urged Mina, "why can't yer?"

"I'm—so—frightened," groaned the unhappy child.

After Bertha had long been breathing regularly again, and Mina's heavy eyes had closed, Maggie still wept softly.

This was Mina's last night in the cellar. Her leave-taking next day, and Bertha's, from the Reschkes' vegetable shop was not a very hearty one. Not only did Mrs. Reschke charge them twopence a day each for sleeping, and threepence for food, and had put no end of work on to Mina's shoulders, she now demanded three shillings from each—"for her trouble," as she said.

When Mina would have objected—had not she got the place at the public-house opposite all by herself, her aunt had not raised a finger—Reschke, who was just then watering the drooping vegetables, raised the watering-can threateningly. "On'y because you're 'er niece, she does it for three, else it 'ud cost four, but if yer can't 'old yer tongue, then——"



Bertha managed to keep the excited girl quiet by twitching her sleeve and treading on her foot. She said good-bye in the friendliest way, but when she had got to the top of the cellar steps with Mina she turned round and screwed up her pretty face into an ugly grimace.

## VI

MINA had been nearly a fortnight in her situation in the public-house. Although it was so near she had not yet had time to run across to her relations, she had no wish to do so either. Her master sent her to another vegetable shop in the Kirchbachstrasse whose owner was a good customer of his.

One evening there was a gentle knock at the back door of the kitchen; when Mina opened it, she was very surprised to see Ella standing outside. Looking round cautiously the child slipped in.

“Isn’t the old man in?”

“Who? The master?”

“He shan’t see me, the old pot-’ouse keeper! Mother sent me to say you’re to buy from us.”

“But I can’t,” said Mina, “I must go where master sends me.”

“In course!” Ella laughed knowingly. “Well, I’ve given you mother’s message. You’d better come to-morrow or there’ll be no end of a row.”

She was off again; Mina ran after her and screamed—

“How’s Maggie?”

Ella only turned round a moment, and shrugged her shoulders—

“Ain’t my business. ’Ow should I know!”

Mina was angry with the pert child; she was really longing to see the silent Maggie, much more than to see Bertha. She had caught a glimpse of her several times when she was sweeping out the shop, tripping along on the other side of the street, holding the youngest child of the von Salderns’ by the hand. She seemed

in very good spirits and turned her head in all directions, but she did not glance once at the public-house.

Mina was looking forward to Sunday; it was her day out, she would visit her friend and perhaps they could go for a nice walk together. She was so excited about it that the night from Saturday till Sunday she could hardly close an eye. She tossed about restlessly on her iron folding-bedstead; the wirework was torn, and the sharp ends of the wires hurt her back through the mattress. It was a narrow bed, not intended for her length; she could not lie straight and had to curl up her legs.

The first nights she had slept as if she were dead, the unaccustomedness of her present occupation tried her more than the hardest labour in the fields. A kind of despair took possession of her when she thought that she should never learn to fill the beer-glasses so that they were by no means full, but still had a great head of froth which ran over at the top. She was not quick enough either in wiping up the spilt dregs of beer; the glasses which she rinsed at the back of the bar passed much too slowly through her hands, and her face was as long as a mute's at a funeral, when she had to remain at her post till midnight, blinking her sleepy eyes in the cloud of smoke which surrounded her on all sides.

Sometimes the customers began to joke with her; they had tried to do so especially when she first came, but she looked so blank that they soon gave it up, and her master murmured something about "a stupid person." With a stony face she washed her glasses and tramped backwards and forwards.

There was only one man, a cabman with a tall hat—the "white-hat cabby" the others called him—who always took notice of her. He was really nice. When he came in the evening, whistling gaily, his white top-hat cocked a little, his first salutation was for her. Although she only returned it shyly, without looking up, yet she always waited for it; it was the first friendly word she had heard since the morning. And the man had such a good voice, and—once when she ventured to glance at him—she discovered that he had such good, true eyes. She thought of the taximeter cab as she tossed, sleepless, from one side to the other, and listened if she could not distinguish his voice in the chaos of

sounds which penetrated from the front of the house to her garret at the back. It was a terrible noise, it had never been heard so bad before ! They were certainly spending a good portion of the wages they had been paid to-day.

Mina shivered and drew the counterpane up higher. She would certainly not like to be one of the women who had come towards midnight and wanted to fetch home their husbands. They had been laughed at, had to go away disappointed ; one of them, whose husband abused her dreadfully, wandered up and down outside for a long time and looked through the glass panes of the door with anxious eyes. Her cabman would never be like that !

With this soothing reflection she closed her eyes resolutely, but sleep did not come. The medley of voices which sometimes sank to a hollow murmur, sometimes rose to a furious clamour, startled her again and again. Now a burst of laughter, and now trembling she half rose ; that was a scream, a shrill scream, like a pig squealing when stuck by the butcher. Were they killing some one ? She listened with wide-open eyes.

There was a terrible racket going on in front ; a dragging about of tables, throwing down of chairs, a trampling of feet, a rattling and clattering, a jostling and hustling. They were fighting ! Now cursing and swearing, and now again loud yells and hoarse cries.

Holding the counterpane under her chin with a convulsive grip the girl sat up in bed.

They did not make such a din at home even at the fair ; or at least she had only heard it from a distance echoing down the village street where every house was familiar to her, and the men who brawled in the inn she all knew by name. But here everything was so terribly strange ! Were they murderers struggling there ? Her teeth chattered with mortal terror. Suppose they should come here ? The door of the narrow passage leading to the kitchen was flung open. They were coming ! With difficulty she suppressed a scream, only a smothered groan escaped her. Drawing the counterpane right over her head she cowered down.

There she lay in a cold perspiration till morning. With the first gleam of light she left her garret, her head ached, her limbs

were heavy. Cautiously, holding her breath, she crept along the passage; her heart beat violently, what would she find? The door leading to the inn-room was flung back on its hinges, tankards had rolled out and along the passage, everywhere lay pieces of broken glass, and there—she scarcely dared look—there lay her master too, across the dirty floor, his arms spread out, his glassy eyes half open and—snoring.

With a feeling of quick relief Mina stepped over him—he was only drunk! She let him lie there, and got to work. She opened the door to the street, and when the fresh morning air blew in noticed how poisonous the atmosphere was inside. Leaning on her broom she stood for a long time at the open door and gazed out into the street, where the calm and quiet of early Sunday morning reigned.

The townspeople were still in bed, but at home they were getting ready to go to church. They were soaping themselves, oiling their hair, and her father was giving his stubbly chin the weekly shave. Her sisters were pushing one another away from the little looking-glass, and trying on their smartest bows; and Max was putting twice as much blacking as usual on his boots, and twisting the hairs on his upper lip, with the hope of making a good impression on the village girls!

Mina uttered a deep sigh. She could not even go to church here!

When she had scoured the boards and got rid of the ugly spots, it gave her a melancholy pleasure to sprinkle the floor with sand; it was the only thing which reminded her of the Sunday at home.

Outside, the city gradually awoke to the Sabbath. Windows opened, doors banged. A milk-cart rattled by, the milkman ringing his bell to announce his coming. Pale women, belonging to the working-class, came slowly out of the big dwelling-houses in the Kirchbachstrasse, carrying their shabby market-bags under their shawls. Sleepy servant-girls, whose straight, untidy fringes showed that the curling-tongs had not yet been used, ran across the Göbenstrasse; the ironing woman's shop at No. 4 was full. It was fine weather to-day for going out; they would make themselves smart with light blouses and white petticoats.

Little by little groups of children assembled on the pavement before the cellar dwellings. Little girls in felt slippers, their hair in innumerable plaits, ran to the baker's for new rolls. A hobble-de-hoy took advantage of the Sunday quiet of the streets to learn to cycle; he rode awkwardly and unsteadily, wobbling about from side to side. Boys, with their faces red and shiny from soap, stood round a lamp-post with their hands in their pockets, just like grown-up loafers, and talked of an excursion to the Tempelhofer Feld. Dogs, barking gaily and making wild leaps, chased one another across the empty street; at a window a canary, whose song on a week-day was drowned by the traffic, trilled loudly.

A delicate, silver-grey haze still hung like a veil over the houses, but long, pale, golden rays which cut the clouds on the sky like glittering knives announced the advent of the sun. Everything was bright; everything full of joy. The whole street awaited the Sunday, and there—Mina craned her neck—a cab, bumped slowly down the street to the cabstand at the corner of Potsdamer Strasse; a shiny white hat gleamed in the sun, a good-natured, to-day rather dissipated-looking face laughed at her. Mina blushed to her ears and smiled broadly.

It was "he"—he turned round once more and cracked his whip.

Embarrassed she went back into the room.

In the meantime the sleeper, chilled by the cool morning air blowing in at the open door, had woken up. Stretching his stiff limbs he loudly abused his accursed business, which obliged him to drink to induce the others to do so. With his abuse mingled the sonorous and solemn voice of the church bells, which, borne by the wind, sounded quite near.

Irritated, he snarled at his servant and ordered his coffee. She replied rudely. Why should she be respectful to such a man?

After he had gone grumbling to bed, Mina, depressed and gloomy, watched the people, dressed in their Sunday best, pass by. She felt tired and worn out and also very desolate.

But her face cleared when at eleven or half-past a cab drove up, and the cabman with the shiny white hat left his horse and carriage outside and, treading heavily, entered the public-house.

“Glass o’ white beer wi’ peppermint—devilish thirsty!” Going up to the bar he stood there and watched her drawing the beer, hastily and awkwardly; the froth ran over and formed a little puddle at the bottom of the broad glass. With an embarrassed laugh Mina wiped up the liquid. Now she could not find the peppermint, though the bottle was just before her.

“Well, little ’un,” he said with a good-natured laugh, “ain’t so very quick, are yer? I could ’ave driven to Spandauer Bock in that time. Ah—” he took a long pull and then wiped the ends of his moustache—“not bad! specially after sich a night. Was a devil of a row, wasn’t it? Could yer sleep at all, miss?”

“No,” she said with downcast eyes.

“I believe yer. You mus’n’t go to bed at all, miss, but stop wi’ us. I’ll guarantee yer’ll have more fun than if you creep between the sheets all alone. But you’re a ’andsome gel, must be a bit livelier.”

She looked at him gratefully. Their eyes met, the blood rushed to her cheeks and mounted to her temples.

He twirled his moustache, put his elbows on the bar and beamed at her. “D’ye like Berlin?”

She shook her head sorrowfully.

“Yer must wait a bit,” he consoled her, “you’ll git to like it! Suppose I were to fetch yer in me carriage! Drive yer to see some proper shows at Treptow or Eierhäuschen. Will yer?”

He had only meant to joke with her, but when he saw how she went first pale and then red, and could hardly shut her mouth for trembling delight, he held out his hand to her. “It’s a bargain, eh!”

She laid her hand in his without much hesitation.

Now he leant right over the bar and put his arm round her robust hips. She was a strapping lass! “Got a sweetheart, miss?”

“Let go!” She pushed him away, but the tone of her voice betrayed bashful pleasure. Her head went round. What would Bertha say? And the Reschkes? What a lot they would think of her—such a handsome fellow!

He drank another glass of white beer with peppermint; and then left the public-house, whistling gaily and nodding an

affectionate farewell to Mina, whom he left behind in a state of happy excitement. With a dreamy look in her eyes and a smiling mouth she stood in the bar, and apparently with great interest watched the solitary autumn fly that staggered weakly up and down the panes of the glass door. But her thoughts were with the auburn moustache and forget-me-not blue eyes of the cabman. A happy perspective opened out before her.

The roast pork and mashed potatoes which she served up for dinner later were cooked still worse than the dinners of the preceding days—and that was saying a great deal.

## VII

MRS. VON SALDERN had not taken to her new servant-girl, though she was always willing, very handy, and had pleasant, modest manners.

“I don’t know,” she lamented to her husband, “what Peters and Bertha are always laughing about in the kitchen. Do listen. There they are again! What are they doing?”

“But, my dear,” said the captain, “you don’t want to be your maid’s confidante! What does it matter to you?”

“No, but I would like to know what they are at.” The mistress listened, the maid’s clear titter could be plainly heard through the closed door of the sitting-room. “I ought not to have engaged such a pretty girl,” she said annoyed.

“Doesn’t she do her duty?”

“Oh yes!”

“Is she impertinent?”

“Oh no!”

“Well, what don’t you like in her?”

“I don’t quite know. Listen, she is laughing again. You must forbid Peters the kitchen. Suppose she should take up with him!”

“If you don’t suffer, it’s all the same to you. You’re not responsible for the morals of your maids.” The captain shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t trouble about her!”

“Yes, but they are always thinking of their own affairs,” complained the young wife. “Especially such a pretty girl.”

Bertha too thought she was a pretty girl when she looked at herself in the glass that afternoon. She had been in her room for an hour, and had locked her door to keep off the children, who were accustomed to find in her an ever-ready playfellow.

She was getting ready to enjoy herself; it was her first Sunday out in Berlin.

There was a strong scent of musk in the servant's room, which was so narrow that only a slender person could squeeze between the bed and the wall; the grocer, from the shop opposite, had presented Bertha with a cake of soap that morning when she went to fetch half-a-pound of coffee, a pound of rice, and a packet of portable soup.

She had soaped herself from head to foot, had enveloped herself in perfume. Now she stood before the glass in her stays and petticoat and did her hair. It was long and fine, and fell over her shoulders in glossy, silky waves.

She buried her teeth in her red under-lip and looked at her fresh young face long and thoughtfully. No, it would be a pity for her to be wasted in this small household of the captain's. It was no place for her. She must get on, higher, higher. All sorts of ambitious plans shot through her brain. Oh, she would put up with anything, if it were worth while, crouch if necessary! You must if you wanted to get on in the world. And had not she learnt in the Reschkes' cellar how people liked to be talked to?

With a resolute look in her eyes which turned the beautiful blue to a hard, steely grey, she nodded to her reflection in the glass; she would give notice here before long, that was certain. But to-day she was going to enjoy herself.

Her Sunday finery was laid out on the bed and she looked at it critically. Mrs. Freier's jet-embroidered cape was still very handsome. She must have been six months in her grave now, and the worms were certainly at her. She thought of it without shuddering, rather with artless pleasure. Otherwise she would never have had the beautiful cape!

The dress she liked less—it was the black skirt she had had for her confirmation, and the pink blouse—but she had not enough



money to get a new one. She had to pay off eight shillings for the feather hat as soon as she received her first month's wages. She had purchased it in Rosalie Grummach's second-hand clothes shop; Minnie from Doctor Ehrlich's had recommended her there, as Minnie bought all her clothes there, and they were quite ladies' dresses. Eight shillings! But it was quite as good as new, turned up on one side, of the softest light felt, and with a long, curling ostrich feather.

Smiling she held it over her head with both hands, the rather startling style suited her gentle Madonna face very well. Her delicate nostrils trembled and dilated with suppressed desire; she seemed to listen to something in the distance—she already heard dance music! Unconsciously she hummed a waltz. And how the people smiled at her—she smiled again—there—a ring at the back-door.

She snatched at her night-jacket angrily. But no, they should open the door themselves, it was her free Sunday! Little Dick's voice sounded outside, "Yes, Bertha is in!"

Directly after somebody knocked at her door. "Bertha, open the door, it's me, Mina!"

Bertha pushed back the bolt. "You—?" she said rather drawn out. Mina embraced her warmly.

"Oh, you're pushing my hat off!" Bertha moved back putting both hands to her head. Cautiously she laid the hat on the bed.

"An' how are ye getting on?"

Mina laughed with a certain bashfulness. "Very well! An' you?"

"Yer can see."

"Where have ye got the fine hat from?"

"Bought it. Beautiful ain't it?"

"It is fine," cried Mina, clasping her hands in admiration.

"Sit 'e down," said Bertha, much more friendly now.

Mina sat down on the edge of the bed and poked at her shoes with the top of her large cotton umbrella; should she confide in her friend? She did not quite know how to begin.

"Bertha," she whispered after long reflection, "I've got a sweetheart."

Bertha was so occupied with herself that she did not seem to hear.

"He's very good, an' very handsome, an'——" She broke off and laughed proudly.

"Is he?" said Bertha, absently. "Look here, I must go, the others are waiting for me."

"Where are ye going?"

"I don't know. I'm going to meet five other girls."

She did not say, "Come with us!" Mina's heart contracted. Smoothing her dress she got up.

"Wait a minute, I'll come down wi' ye," cried Bertha.

Holding her cape on one finger by the loop, and twirling it like a weathercock, she sprang lightly down the back stairs after Mina.

At the door of the courtyard she shook her hand. "Good-bye, Mina, have a good time!" Suddenly a thought struck her, and acting on a good-natured impulse she caught at the skirt of the slowly retreating girl. "Come wi' us, Mina!"

"No, no."

"Are ye angry wi' me?"

"No, no, I——"

Mina did not finish her sentence, she got fiery red and with sparkling eyes looked after the taximeter cab which rolled past them lightly and elegantly, in spite of its being quite full inside. The driver raised his whip to his tall hat a moment in greeting. Bertha laughed. "D'ye know him too?"

"Who d'ye mean?" stammered Mina bashfully.

"The cabby with the white hat! The ironing woman's husband!"

"The iron—ing woman's—husband?"

"She's luck, hasn't she? A nice fellow an' always jolly. He's enough to make you die o' laughing. When he's at home he stands in the shop an' carries on with the girls. She do do a business! Oh, let go!"

Mina squeezed the arm of the gaily chattering girl convulsively. "Who's married, did ye say—he was?"

Bertha laughed loudly. "Should he ha' waited for you, p'r'aps?"

"No, no." Mina could not get anything else out and mechanically took leave.

Sunshine lay on the broad pavement and the asphalt of the street. It hurt her eyes. They burned like fire. She crept back close to the houses in the shade. The public-house seemed to her like a yawning grave. She stole up-stairs to her garret and tore her hat from her head. A pale, perplexed face looked at her from the broken looking-glass; she clenched her fist. "Such a fellow," she said angrily, and then she threw herself on her bed, buried her face in her pillow, and wept bitterly. And weeping she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was already dark.

A feeling of utter desolation came over her—had she nobody who cared about her? Was she quite alone in this great strange town? The thought of Bertha made her utterly miserable. She was sitting in a beer-garden and enjoying herself, or perhaps even dancing, and had left her alone in this dark hole! She could have cried her eyes out of her head. What should she do now? Write home? Oh, no. Was she doing so well that they would stand agape at home?

She swallowed down her tears and got up tired and sad. Why did not Maggie come to see her? Even Ella would have been welcome at that moment.

She put on her hat again and went slowly across to the vegetable cellar; unwillingly, and with hesitating steps, and yet something drew her there. She could not endure her loneliness any longer.

Now she stood before the blue varnished door. It was locked. With melancholy eyes she looked up and down the street; it was growing dusk, the air mild and enervating. Solitary couples, in blissful enjoyment of their Sunday out, sauntered along the pavement—they came from the Zoo or from somewhere outside the town, from wood and heath! A girl with a laughing face carried a whole bunch of golden-yellow autumn leaves and a sprig of red berries. Oh—!

She knocked again and again, not only with her finger, but with her fist. In vain! Then she ran through the gateway into the courtyard, perhaps the Reschkes would hear her knocking at the back-door. One of them must be at home; somebody always remained in case of a forgetful servant coming round the back-

way to ask for a bottle of beer or something necessary for supper. But her knocking was in vain here too! She called, "Uncle! Aunt! Uncle! Maggie!"

With yearning eyes she examined the small, sunken window-panes of the cellar dwelling; they had a thick coating of dust from the rubbish of the courtyard being constantly blown against them. Not a ray of light. The whole of the big house was as silent as the grave, it stood there like a gigantic coffin under the darkening sky. Pale stars began to appear. The lonely girl stretched herself and threw her head quite back in order to be able to see the faint glow of the autumn sky high up between the tall begrimed walls. A cold shudder ran down her back. A cat, mewing miserably, climbed over the wall of the neighbouring house; the night wind rose, was caught in the narrow courtyard, and whistled in the dreary corners. But still she could not make up her mind to go away. "Uncle! Aunt! Maggie! Arthur! Gertie! Ella!" Her cries became more and more urgent, they resounded in the narrow court.

A window opened above in the second storey and a woman dressed in black looked out. "Don't make such a disturbance on Sunday! Nobody is at home down there—they have all gone out on pleasure, of course!"

The window was shut again. The sharp tones had frightened Mina, she no longer ventured to call loudly. Gently but urgently she knocked at the nearest window, it was the window of Arthur's room.

"Arthur! Arthur!"

## VIII

THE Reschkes had all gone off towards three o'clock. At two they had begun to prepare for the excursion to Halensee; Gertrude had to wave Ella's hair with the curling-tongs, Mother Reschke filled a leather handbag with greasy cake and sandwiches. It was a pretty sight, the two daintily dressed girls, Gertie holding Ella

by the hand, walking before their parents. Mr. Reschke looked highly respectable in a top-hat and gilt watch-chain; he had his wife on his arm, who rustled along in all the glory of a violet-coloured dress and cape trimmed with lace. Who knows, perhaps they would meet somebody who would do for Gertrude!

Arthur did not want to go with them, he was angry with his parents. When he was alone he made himself comfortable by taking off his coat and flinging off his boots; then he lay down on the sofa in the best room, let his legs hang over the arm and smoked one cigar after the other. The Sunday quiet and twilight of the cellar made him sleepy; he rose, staggered into his room and got on to his bed; he lay more comfortably there.

Arthur had been taciturn for some time; he went to school reluctantly in the morning with his books under his arm, and returned home reluctantly. Sullenly he turned over the food on his plate.

“Wot’s the matter, Arthur,” asked his anxious mother.

“Will yer be quiet,” she screamed at silent Maggie, “an’ don’t allus disturb Arthur! ’E’s got summut to think about; ’e’s goin’ to be a doctor!”

If only they had not been bent upon this! Arthur had not the slightest inclination to study. Not even to prepare his lessons for school. Instead of working he lay on the bed in his room and dozed, or sat with his legs stretched out, stemmed his feet against a pile of books, and puffed at a cigar.

He had not been moved up at Michaelmas; now, after the holidays, he sat in the third class again with boys who were a head shorter than he. And these little chaps laughed at him. He entirely lost his self-possession. When he was questioned, he knew nothing at all. The master shrugged his shoulders; he did not say a word, but he took the young fellow, whose moustache was beginning to sprout, aside and asked him to consider if it would not be better to take up something else than to sit on the same form with children at school.

Arthur did not dare say anything about this at home; he had not the courage. He had got limp from sitting so long in class. And so he continued to squeeze his long legs behind the low desk and to dream with his eyes open during the lessons. The smell

of the cellar followed him into the school. He smelt the decaying cabbage, the rotting fruit; he saw the laughing faces of the girls, he heard their chattering, their gossip; their skirts rustled, he felt as if they touched him. His mother liked the young man to be about in the cellar, she urged him on. Now he could not get away from it.

The cellar—the cellar. He had taken root in it. His eyes were accustomed to the darkness there and were dazzled by the bright light of the school-room. What were the use of Latin and Greek to him?—"A bunch of parsley! Ten pounds of potatoes! Where shall we go next Sunday? Dancing? How's your sweetheart?" This was the language that he understood. The girls flirted with him, and his mother winked at him encouragingly. What were the use of books to him?

A few days before the head-master had written to his father and requested him to remove his son from the school; he was a scandal to the class, and was also endangering his future by thus wasting his time.

Mother Reschke was beside herself, her pride deeply wounded. She rushed into the room where her son was sitting, staring listlessly into a book, snatched it from him, and struck him on the head with it. The leaves came away from the binding and fluttered into the corners.

"You sluggard! You blockhead! You—you——" A flood of abuse poured from her. "'Ave we spent our money, an' toiled an' moiled for you to be lazy? 'Aven't you a jot of pride in you? 'Aven't you no shame? Shouldn't yer be a 'elp in their old age to yer parents who've sacrificed 'emselves for you? You'll come down to rag-pickin'! I know yer will. But no, me boy, that won't do—that I owe the doctor—as true as I stand 'ere, you goes to school an' learns."

He laughed into her face bitterly. "Learn! I am much too old. Ask the head-master. They laugh at me."

"Fudge! Father 'll tell the 'ead-master wot 'e thinks about it. You goes!"

"I won't."

"Now then." Mrs. Reschke looked at her son as if he were raving.

She touched his forehead with her finger. "Consumptive, eh? I say you goes."

"And I won't," he screamed with the sudden courage of despair; "do what you like, I'll run away."

"Haha! try it. I tell you, you'll soon come back to mother. Would just suit yer to carry stones for buildin' or sweep snow. Wot will yer do? Can't do nothin'!"

The boy groaned and hid his face in his hands.

"No, no," she went on more gently, stooped, and carefully collected the scattered leaves of the book. "That's all stuff an' nonsense. They're unjust to you at school, but don't yer be sat upon. I'll show 'em wot's wot. You'll be a doctor, an' there's an end of it."

"I won't—I'll never—I can't!"

"An' why not, if I *may* ask? That 'ud be summut new!" Indignant she struck the table with her fist. "If mother says yer will, yer will!"

"I can't."

"Why can't yer, eh?"

He lifted his head from his hands and looked at his mother with his swollen, bloodshot eyes. His face was ashy pale, his lips trembled. He could not speak, but it was a long, mutely eloquent look.

"Out with it, why can't yer?"

He looked round wildly. Across from the shop came the laughter and screams of the servant-girls, father was carrying on his practical business jokes with them; next door Ella squeaked one of her bravura pieces and beat time to it with her heels.

"D'ye hear?" he burst out. "I can't; the cellar! the cellar! d'ye hear?"

"Well, wot?" She looked at him blankly.

"The cellar! Can't you understand, I come from a cellar; I'm not fit to study. Let me do something I'm fit for."

She screamed loudly. "Wot, the cellar ain't respectable? It ain't good enough for you 'ere? Wait a moment! Reschke, Reschke!"

He came running.

"Reschke!" She stood gasping for breath, and pointed her

outstretched finger at her son. "Isn't good enough for 'im—the cellar. 'E—'e's ashamed of 'is parents!"

"Now we know where we are. Yer ashamed—ashamed o' us? You cursed brat!"

"I'm not ashamed of you at all," screamed their son. He had jumped up and stood with his head thrust forward staring at his parents. "I only say I'm not fit to study; do understand that."

"Wot, you'll abuse our cellar?" Reschke took hold of Arthur by the collar of his coat and shook him violently. "I'll teach ye!"

"We're disgraced!" shrieked Mrs. Reschke, "regular disgraced! Won't go to school—won't be a doctor? Reschke, you goes to the 'ead-master ter-morrow an' sets 'im to rights. Or better, you goes on the spot."

"I can't go to school any longer. I won't go to school any longer!"

"'Old yer tongue!" The strong father took hold of his long, weakly son, and shook him till he was as limp in his peasant-grip as a loose bundle of clothes.

Mrs. Reschke trembled with fury. "Should thank God that you 'ave parents that'll let ye study, yer—yer——!"

"I can't study!" Arthur tore himself away from his father and held his head as if stunned.

"Take this then!" His mother lifted her arm and gave him a box on his ears that turned his pale cheek a dark red. For a moment it seemed as if the son would rebel, the vein on his forehead swelled, but directly after the long figure collapsed and sank into the nearest chair. He began to sob.

"Yer see," said Mrs. Reschke. And she went out taking her husband with her. "Come, leave 'im alone now! 'E's a good boy is Arthur. 'E'll think better of it."

Mr. Reschke had not gone to the head-master "on the spot," nor the next day, nor the day after; there had been too much to do in the shop.

And then came Sunday, and that they would enjoy in peace and quietness. They no longer spoke of going to the head-master, the whole scene with Arthur seemed to be forgotten as if it had never taken place.



But Arthur had not forgotten it. Now when he lay on his bed and slept in the solitude of the Sunday afternoon, his forehead was contracted with pain. He groaned in his dream—the master called him up, he knew nothing, nothing at all, and the little fellows laughed at him——

“Arthur! Arthur!”

He started up. It was a girl’s voice, and now somebody knocked at the window.

Half awake he stumbled to the door.

He was very disappointed to find Mina there, but she, on the contrary, was delighted to see somebody and pressed his hand warmly.

She followed him into the sitting-room. The lamp was not lighted yet; in the grey dusk she could only see the gleam of his white shirt-sleeves, and he saw the vague, refined outlines of her face. The clock ticked cosily, they could hear a mouse gnawing in some corner. They sat down on the sofa far apart from each other. She began to talk in an undertone. He had not questioned her, but she felt impelled to do so, to complain a little with a gentleness which was quite unusual with her. He listened sleepily; her peasant way of speaking had improved a little, at least it no longer disturbed him.

Mina’s voice trembled when she related that Bertha had gone out to enjoy herself and had left her alone—quite alone!

Alone! Was not he so too? Arthur seized Mina’s hand. They moved nearer together.

“A hateful life,” he sighed, yawning.

“It wer’n’t at all kind o’ them to leave ye here so alone,” she said sympathizingly.

“Oh, I don’t care! If they’d only listen to reason! They want me to stick at school. I don’t learn anything there!”

“That I believe. If you haven’t got it in yer, it’s like trying to make a cock lay eggs—an’ he just can’t.”

“You’re not at all so stupid,” he said.

She smiled pleased.

“I won’t go to school any more,” he murmured to himself. His face had cleared over Mina’s rather drastic comparison, but now it darkened again. “I’m altogether miserable!”

“Poor Arthur,” she sighed pityingly.

He let his head drop on her shoulder. "You can say what you like to mother, she doesn't understand. She's too uneducated. And father's still worse! You should have heard the two old people t'other day! It was enough to make you stand on your head!"

He was silent. She was silent too, but when she heard him sigh she passed her hand over his hair. He leant against her shoulder like a helpless child, a motherly feeling arose in her. She went on stroking his head gently.

"I can't go to school any longer. I can't study! I can't, I can't," he lamented.

"Well, what will ye do?" she asked.

"Do I know?" he groaned. "Feel!" He stretched out his arm. "Eighteen—and nothing to feel! Others who are as old as I have muscles like iron."

"Then you must be a waiter, you don't want bones like an ox for that."

He shuddered.

"Or how'd you like to be in a grocer's shop, same as opposite! It must be fine to weigh out coffee an' treacle!"

He shook his head negatively.

"Yer might learn to be a tailor. Then you'd sit on a table always, wouldn't even have to stand. There's one at home with a wooden leg, an' he's got the custom of all the rich peasants. He does well!"

"No, no!"

"Well then, I don't know," she said, at the end of her wisdom; "what will ye do?"

"Nothing," he brought out, let his head slip from her shoulder and strike against the top of the table.

There he lay for a long time without moving. She did not venture to utter a sound, but at last she tapped him gently on the back of his neck with her forefinger.

He did not stir.

"Arthur!"

He raised his troubled face, but when she asked anxiously "What's the matter?" he began to laugh. Springing up, he threw his arm round her waist.

"You're a good sort, Mina! What luck that the old people are out! Now we can have a regular good talk."

And they did. Mina would never have believed that Arthur, who had been such an unmannered lad that time in the cellar, could be so nice. Quite a young man! And how well he could express himself! She felt his moustache tickle her cheek, and sat there in mute admiration.

And Arthur rallied under this admiration; he felt himself somebody, twisted the hairs on his upper lip, and finally proposed to her that she should go for a walk with him some evening.

"Yes, if you'll fetch me," she said frankly. "Or shall I fetch you, when I've time?"

"No, no, don't do that! mother mus'n't know!"

"Be she still so angry wi' me?" asked Mina dejectedly. "I can't buy here when master sends me somewhere else!"

"Don't come here! I'll send you word," said Arthur quickly. "It's much more fun when we go on the sly, isn't it?" He clasped her tighter and approached his mouth to hers to kiss her.

"No, no Arthur," she turned her head away and gave him a little slap, "yer mus'n't be childish."

He laughed and came still nearer.

Suddenly they were startled—there was a rattling of keys in front, at the blue varnished door, steps in the shop.

The boy started back. "The old people! Quick, get away, quickly!" In embarrassed haste he pushed her towards the back-door.

But it was too late! Mrs. Reschke had thrown open the glass door and lighted into the room with a match.

"Where's Arthur? Wot," she called, astonished, "you're sittin' 'ere, an' it's pitch dark! An' there's——"

The match went out; in frigid silence Mrs. Reschke struck another. "Ah! indeed!" she went on, lighting the lamp and all the while looking fixedly at the young girl, who stood before her confused and flushed. "Wot procures us the honour? Thought yer couldn't find the way 'ere!"

"Good-evenin', aunt," whispered Mina shyly.

Mrs. Reschke did not seem to see the outstretched hand, but Mr. Reschke said good-naturedly, "Good-evenin', Mina! You're

come to see us at last? 'Ow are they at 'ome? 'Ow d'yer like your new place?"

"Not much!" Mina let her head drop on her breast. "Am so alone there."

"'Omesick?" Mr. Reschke laughed.

"Can think so," said Mrs. Reschke sharply, "when yer neglect your relations so! I must say I've never known sich——"

"That'll do, my dear," interrupted her husband, "Mina's come now."

"As she? Yes, on a Sunday when there's nothing doin'. If the greens is so much better in the Kirchbachstrasse on week-days, she can go there Sundays too. I don't want 'er."

"Now, dear," said Mr. Reschke soothingly; and Arthur whispered softly behind Mina's back, "Say that you'll buy here! Quick!"

Good Heavens! if her relations were to shut their doors upon her! Arthur was perhaps angry too.

"I would like to buy here," she stammered, "but he sends me somewhere else. What shall I do? Oh dear!"

"Are you so stupid?" jeered her aunt. "Need yer let 'im know? The pot-'ouse keeper, the skinflint, the old miser! It's all the same to 'im where you spends 'is beggarly money. You does as if you goes into the Kirchbach, an' when he ain't looking yer turns round an' comes across 'ere. There!"

Mina wanted to reply that that would not be right, but Mrs. Reschke's threatening face frightened her; Arthur, too, trod on her foot warningly. And so she said—very reluctantly the words came out—that she would do so.

"Certain sure?"

"Certain sure," she repeated.

Her aunt smiled sweetly. "Sit down a bit, Mina. Reschke, go an' fetch some white beer. Oh, it *is* 'ot. Mina 'll be thirsty. Gertie, go an' light father. Bring the big bottles, d'ye 'ear? Sit down, me daughter." She nodded to Mina, and when Father Reschke and Gertie had disappeared into the shop she stretched out her broad hand over the table to her.

"I'm that glad to see yer, Mina; I was regular longin' for yer. Ah, Arthur"—she winked at her big boy who leant against the

table, pale and listless—"that just suits you ter sit an' talk alone 'ere with a pretty gel; I know you." She laughed and gave him a friendly nudge.

It turned out a very merry evening. Mina was quite enveloped in kindness. Her uncle filled up her glass continually, it was never empty; her aunt gave her all kinds of good advice and promised soon to get her a better place than she had at the "old pot-'ouse keeper's" opposite. Gertrude made her tie, which she had fastened very awkwardly, into a "chic" bow, and Arthur gave her now and then a look of secret meaning which did her good.

Mina was very happy; all at once she thought, where was Maggie? You could hear the wind howling outside and the rain splashing on the stone flags of the court; the beautiful, late-summer afternoon had changed into a bad autumn evening. Where was the child?

"Ah, Maggie," said Father Reschke, in answer to her question; the others took no notice of it.

After a time Mina asked again, she could not get the thought of the silent girl out of her head. "Where's Maggie gone to?"

Ella, who had been dozing in the sofa-corner, sat up with a jerk. "Maggie? She's with the Hallelujah girls, she is; Hihih!"

"Wi' the Hallelujah girls again?" grinned Father Reschke. "She'll end by bein' one 'erself."

They all laughed.

"Let 'er be," said her mother, "she's well looked after there."

"Ella, sing that song—you know what I mean," called out Gertrude.

"Yes, sing, Ella pet!" coaxed her mother.

"No, I'm tired," said the child, affectedly.

"Yer not; do sing."

"Sing Ella, sing!"

"If you'll sing, I'll give yer sixpence," promised her father.

Ella had been standing there with a cross face, but now with a quick movement she suddenly threw her legs into the air; her father was bending over her and she almost touched his nose with the tips of her toes. Her starched white petticoats rustled, her mane of fair hair fluttered wildly. She began in a shrill voice—

“I’m Josephine of the Salvationists,  
’Tis I that run the show.”

The mouths opened in a broad grin, the family listened with extreme pleasure.

“When I a crowd of men do see,  
I’m there at once, I lose no time,  
Thinks I, there’s converts there for me;  
’Tis I that run the show.”

More and more flinging about of legs, the singing became shriller and shriller.

The audience nearly died of laughing. Gertrude squeaked and squirmed as if she were being tickled; Mr. Reschke kept slapping his knee: “Haha-hoho!” Mrs. Reschke held her sides: “Leave off, Ella, leave off! I shall burst—good Lor’, I’ll burst!”

There was no leaving off. The child raved like a drunken Bacchante. Her father beat time with his feet, her mother could only groan now and rock herself to and fro.

The capers became more and more extravagant; the movements bolder. The refrain was no longer sung, it was screamed breathlessly, with gasping intervals—

“I’m—Josephine—of the—Salvationists.”

Resounding cries of “Bravo!” noisy clapping of hands, universal delight.

There—from the court outside a pitiable voice, a scarcely intelligible cry!

“Josephine of the Salvationists,” screeched Gertrude. Shaking with laughter, she stumbled to the back-door to open it for her sister. The others had not heard the knocking.

“There yer are at last!” cried her mother, who could still scarcely speak for laughing. The whole family laughed as Maggie, dazzled by the lamplight and puzzled by the extraordinary mirth with which she was received, stood there motionless.

“Don’t stand there like a fool,” screamed her mother. “’Ow d’yer look? Wet thro’ an’ thro’!”

And her father cried, “A soused poke-bonnet!”

And all laughed and laughed : "Haha-hoho-hehe-hihi !" Maggie looked round imploringly ; her pale cheeks flushed, her lips trembled. A gleam of joy passed over her face when she discovered Mina.

She drew the child down by her. "Why d'ye never come an' see me, Maggie?" she whispered in her ear. "Do come!"

And Maggie whispered back, "They wouldn't let me, they watched!" A convulsive shudder passed through her slight frame ; throwing her arms round her cousin's neck, she whispered as she embraced her passionately, "I've seen 'Im——! 'E was there——now—to-day—in the midst of us! With us, with me! In the 'all!"

Mina started back ; she gazed perplexed at the little dripping figure. An ecstatic gleam was in Maggie's eyes.

## IX

BERTHA thought of her Sunday out the whole week through ; it was a pity that it only came once a fortnight ! That was a mere drop for her thirst ; she always enjoyed herself splendidly.

Sometimes she stood by the fire-place quite lost in thought and stared into the flames ; then she let all the pictures of her Sunday pass through her mind ; the crowd of people, the gay clothes, the laughing faces. She heard the dance music, the scraping of feet, the compliments whispered into her ears. She was very popular, they were quite mad about her. Light as a feather she flew along in the dance, her pretty form whirled from one arm into the other like a petal driven by the wind. The dance might be ever so fast and furious, she always kept her same cool freshness ; the delicate pink on her cheeks turned scarcely a shade deeper. The clear blue of her eyes remained untroubled even when some one trod secretly on her foot or whispered a passionate word into her ear ; she looked at him with wide-open eyes without moving an eyelash. She only laughed her clear laugh, of peculiar crystal clearness ; it made the men quite mad.

She was not without an honest suitor either: Peters, the soldier-servant, was over head and ears in love with her. Even if he was not the son of a peasant of the marshes—his father owned a few acres on the uplands—still he would inherit a cottage, two cows, and a dozen sheep. And perseveringly he described to her his “Wandrup” on the treeless heath, as the most beautiful place in the world. In the evening he crept down to her in the kitchen from his bedroom, which was on the fifth floor under the roof, close to the wash-house; then he sat on the wooden bench and whittled away embarrassed at a piece of wood while she leant against the kitchen stove, her arms crossed on her breast, her feet in dainty leather slippers stretched out in front of her.

A smile played round her mouth—that would be a pretty piece of business to marry somebody who had nothing! She had seen enough of that here, at the captain’s; what use was it their being fond of one another! A miserably poor house! Everything of the cheapest, and the captain’s old trousers altered for Dicky. The mistress looked at every penny, and got so nervous over it that she was quite unbearable. She would come running into the kitchen and shout, “There’s enough fire there to roast an ox,” when there were only a few coals glowing in the fire-place. She did not like Peters sitting in the kitchen of an evening; too much petroleum was used then. When Peters was not there Bertha stood down-stairs in the dusky niche of the house-door or gossiped in the Reschkes’ cellar. Mrs. von Saldern did not mind that; the girl could stay out till midnight if only she were up early next morning.

Now it was winter, at least according to the almanac—the weather was not much like it. No frost, but rain every day. The Reschkes’ cellar was like a steamy cave in which you saw shapes appear and disappear like infernal creatures in the bubbling cauldron of a witch.

Mrs. Reschke had not seats enough for all her visitors of an evening; men came too, sweethearts from the neighbourhood, who wanted to see their girls a moment under cover. If Mrs. Reschke was in a good temper she would open the door of her private room to the waiting suitor and call out benevolently to the girl who came hurrying in, “Make ‘aste, he’s in there,



nobody'll disturb you there!" Only Ella sat in the best room. But she was a child!

Mina and Bertha often met in the cellar in the morning; Mrs. Reschke had talked her niece out of her resentment against Bertha. "Don't be so spiteful, Mina, one 'and washes t'other. An' isn't she a nice girl?"

Mina thought so too, and one especial feeling drew her to Bertha again and again; she was a piece of her home, which in the bustle of the town and the daily round of work seemed to be disappearing more and more into the distance. They wrote from home so seldom. Her father had dictated a letter to Mollie a short time before; there was nothing in it but "We're all well," and then came a long litany of presents they wished her to send them at Christmas. Not a word of what Mina would like to have heard; she had torn open the letter so joyfully, and put it down vexed.

She complained to Bertha. She laughed. "Don't be so stingy!"

"No, no, it isn't that! But they don't ask after me at all!"

"Let 'em be! Send them something, an' then it's all right. I've sent mother something too; she's always plaguin' me."

Bertha was right; she was on very good terms with her mother now, better than she had ever been when she was at home. Mrs. Fidler made the round of the whole village and showed the shawl her daughter had sent her from Berlin; she was very proud of it.

Bertha had bought the shawl cheap at Rosalie Grummach's; it was silk, with a coloured stripe. She liked to buy in the little, gloomy, second-hand shop; there were cast-off ladies' dresses there. With sparkling eyes she turned over the things. Mother and daughter Grummach, two creatures with large noses, blinking eyes, and a mass of tangled, frizzled hair, willingly spread out their wares before her with many praises of their value. Bertha was a good customer; if she had set her heart upon anything she must have it. She did not mind what she gave for it. It was no wonder that the two Grummachs, who peeped out from their hiding-place behind the old clothes like owls, pounced upon her whenever she went past. With a gay laugh she tried on one

thing and another and turned round before the glass which the daughter officiously held up for her while the mother exhausted herself in flattering speeches and assurances of enormous cheapness. All her wages were spent in this way ; very often part of the next quarter's in advance.

Bertha often borrowed a trifle from Mina ; she gave it with some reluctance, but did not dare refuse her friend. However, she could not help growling : " You've fourteen pounds a year, five pounds more than I have ! I don't know what yer do with it ! "

" Don't know either ! " And Bertha laughed. The money ran through her fingers like water. She could not help buying a tart now and then, a Berlin " pfannkuchen " or a cake with whipped cream, that she must do ; the food was not plentiful at the captain's. At the grocer's opposite she got a cake of chocolate now instead of a piece of soap, but that was eaten up in a moment. Fourteen pounds !—she could not make it do ! She must have more.

Mrs. Reschke advised her to stay where she was till she had had her Christmas presents, and then to give notice on the first of January. " You'll see, you'll get ten places for one ! "

As the day came nearer Bertha did not feel so very comfortable. She never neglected now to do as if she were quite out of breath when she came up the four flights ; her mistress should think she could not stand going up and down the stairs.

Now the carp for Christmas was sent in. That was a rarity, usually they only had cheap salt-water fish. Trembling with excitement, the children stood round the kitchen table : a fish, a live fish ! There it lay, a big creature ; its scales gleamed golden, and it struck about violently with its tail.

" Has it moss on its head ? " asked Dick.

" Now it has moss," said Bertha laughing, and gave the fish a blow on the head with a wooden ladle.

" Do you know what you have to do with it ? " asked Mrs. von Saldern, looking into the kitchen for a moment.

" Of course, ma'am ! " Bertha had no idea, but she was not going to confess that. She set to work to scrape the fish ; " scrape it alive," she had heard, " it's easier."

The carp lay quite still as if stunned ; the knife flashed, the scales flew—all of a sudden it curled itself together as if in convulsions, then it jerked up. Describing a high circle, it jumped from the board to the floor, where it floundered about.

The children screamed loudly with terror. Bertha seized it and threw it on the board again ; she felt rather nervous, but she pulled herself together. She encouraged herself with a laugh. Only be quick ! What ? She was not going to have her apron made dirty !

The fish wriggled about. She told the boy to hold its slippery tail tightly with a cloth. She made the knife sharp. Scale after scale fell. The great soulless eyes of the creature stared, its mouth opened—mute, mute ! Blood flowed, it trickled out from under the scales. Little Dick was scared, he loosed his hold of the tail—there—a scream from the children—a scream from Bertha—the fish had sprung at her face. She let the knife fall, her laugh ceased—oh, that hurt !

“Beast !” It slipped out of her hands ; now it floundered on the floor again. Shrieking, she went down on her knees after it—here, there—this way and that—straight on, sideways—now she had it—now it was under the chair, now under the table. The children crowded into a corner, the youngest began to cry.

“Will ye ?” Her apron was quite dirty now, she was no longer concerned about that. She snatched after the fish in all directions ; excitement had taken possession of her, a strange irritation, anger against the creature that had given her so much trouble. The blood mounted to her head, her lips twitched.

“I’ve got you !” She had. She seized it in an iron grip. It opened its mouth wide—there—didn’t it look fierce, didn’t it snap at her finger ?

“What, you’ll bite ?” She gnashed her teeth, a resentful fire gleamed in her eyes. “I’ll teach yer !” Pressing down the flapping fish, she knelt on it. “Beast, beast !” she screamed angrily with contorted mouth.

With terrified cries the children fled out of the kitchen. Mrs. von Saldern heard them, and hurrying in found Bertha bending over the fish, her face fiery red, and a strange expression on her still laughing face.

The bloody knife lay on the floor; with both hands she tore the guts out of the fish, which still moved in the last convulsions. "It doesn't like it—ha!"

"These girls are incredibly brutal," said Mrs. von Saldern to her husband, quite horrified.

And yet who could say that Bertha was brutal? She liked to be touched. Every week she bought a novel, sometimes two, for twopence from the hawker who stole up the back-stairs. She could not read enough of poor, deceived, trusting girls, of rich seducers, of mysterious, shameful deeds perpetrated in the great city.

At night she lay in her cold bedroom—her chilled hands could hardly hold the book—and read. The candle, which she had taken out of the chandelier in the drawing-room, flared in the draught which came in through the cracks of the ill-fitting little window, and threw long, strange shadows on the whitewashed wall. There was a damp smell of mildew in the room, the stove was never heated there; shivering she drew closer round her the shawl which she had put on over her night-jacket. Midnight; one o'clock, sometimes later. At last she put out the candle, shook herself in voluptuous horror and drew the counterpane up under her chin. Stories of love and murder followed her into her dreams.

On the first of January Bertha gave notice. Very modestly, and with a certain regret in tone and manner; she was very sorry to do so, but she clearly felt that the four flights of stairs were bad for her chest.

Mrs. von Saldern was thunderstruck, speechless she looked at the girl's fresh rosy face, at the clear eyes which sparkled with health.

"An' then, ma'am——" Bertha thought it best to be open, perhaps madam would raise her wages. If no very brilliant place offered now, perhaps after all she would stay here with a rise and wait for something better. "I want too many boots here. What I wear out on the stairs is not to be said! An' with fourteen pounds I can't pay for it, it's impossible!"

"It is the utmost we can give," said the young wife in a low voice. She seemed sad; for a long time she stood at the sitting-

room window, her hands on the window-knob, and gazed out with dimmed eyes at the grey, wintry, rain-swept street. She could not keep a servant! Money, money! Yes, those people who could give sixteen, eighteen, twenty pounds—*they* had good servants who stayed in their places!

She was looking so troubled when Bertha came in to lay the cloth that with one of her sudden, amiable impulses she said, "I know a girl that would suit you, ma'am!"

"Do you?" Roused for the moment, Mrs. von Saldern looked round.

"My friend 'ud like to change." Bertha had, only yesterday, borrowed three shillings from Mina, and now she turned over quickly in her mind that she would not be likely to ask her for the money if she helped her to get away from the public-house. And would not Mrs. von Saldern be indebted to her if she got her a new servant? She would remember it in giving her a character. She therefore praised her friend in every way: honest, hardworking, modest, handy, and so on.

"Where is she now?"

"She has a place in a restaurant!" And then after a short pause: "Opposite, at the corner of the Kirchbachstrasse."

"What, the public-house?" Mrs. von Saldern's face lengthened. "I can't take a girl from such surroundings!"

"You can be quite easy, ma'am," Bertha assured her; "she is a very respectable girl, we're from the same village. She's not been lucky, that's all. But she would suit you, ma'am, she's tall and strong. You will have seen her in the Reschkes' cellar!"

"Yes, yes, I remember. But nothing to look at!" The young wife sighed. "I must have a superior-looking person to open the door."

"And so she's to be superior-looking too?" was on the tip of Bertha's tongue; but she suppressed the remark and looked down at her own figure with a little complacent smile. "Oh, when she's in a good house, you'll see, ma'am, she'll improve!"

And so Mrs. von Saldern decided to engage Mina. She was to have eleven pounds, which was ample for this rather clumsy-looking servant-girl.

Mina was radiant; in the joy of her heart she embraced Bertha over and over again. She would never forget what she had done for her. Her happiness was not at all disturbed by the character the public-house keeper gave her: "Indolent, slow, given to contradicting, otherwise honest."

Bertha was more than ever in the Reschkes' cellar now. Many places had been offered her, but Mrs. Reschke dissuaded energetically; they were all at some distance, and she did not like girls who bought much from her to go far away. At last something suitable offered. Mrs. Reschke read the advertisement in a daily paper, which she borrowed from the grocer opposite for twopence an hour.

"Housemaid (experienced). Wanted immediately in a gentleman's family; good wages. Apply 72, Potsdamer Strasse."

"Good wages" was printed in bold type. Mrs. Reschke at once sent Ella up to Bertha. She left everything as it was, the kitchen half turned out, plates and dishes from dinner unwashed, the children alone—their parents were out—and rushed into her bedroom to dress. What should she put on? If she had only known the taste of the family at 72, Potsdamer Strasse! At last she decided for a print dress. She was dreadfully cold as she ran across the street in this garment, but the consciousness of how rosy her face looked against the blue and white of the body, and how attractive her whole person was in this simple get-up, helped her to bear it.

She came back quite dazzled, three shillings, the pledge of her engagement, in her pocket. They had shown her into a drawing-room where the mistress of the house, in a silk *negligé*, trimmed with lace, lay on a sofa and read in a book.

Magnificent curtains covered the windows, the foot sank into a thick carpet; pictures in broad gold frames hung on the walls, glass flowers adorned the chandelier. Everywhere costly knick-knacks, an abundance of expensive furniture. Bertha drew a deep breath; it was not like that at the captain's! Everything was so scattered about there; in the drawing-room a sofa, table, arm-chair, piano and a round marble table with a lamp on it—that was all. The carpet was not anything like large enough for the room. She was so full of admiration for what she saw that

she hardly ventured to move, but her reflection smiling at her from the cut-glass mirror over the mantelpiece gave her courage.

Mrs. Selinger was the widow of a rich man and an enthusiastic admirer of art. And this caused her to admire beauty too. She never engaged ugly servants. Bertha's appearance prepossessed her immediately. This charming person must always be seen in a pink dress, white cap and embroidered apron. After a very few questions Bertha was engaged; it was hardly necessary to show the excellent character which the captain, at his wife's request, had written for her. After the assurance of fifteen pounds a year wages, and a rise of one pound after the first quarter, she took her leave.

In the carpeted corridor, whose many doors were close shut to Bertha's inquisitive eyes, they met a well-dressed young man with black hair and eyes, a bluish shade on the clean-shaven cheeks and full chin. He scrutinized her in passing.

"The young master," said the maidservant, meaningly, as she let her out.

Bertha rushed at once to the Reschkes' cellar to announce her good fortune. The storm of the evening had not yet begun, and so Mrs. Reschke had time to give her advice with regard to her new situation.

They sat together on the inverted tub, back to back.

The girl looked up at the steps down which at least a faint current of air made its way, and listened smiling.

The old woman gazed back into her hole of a cellar which yawned gloomily before her and talked on in her hoarse, impressive voice. The dusty, smoky, petroleum lamp which swung from the low, vaulted ceiling, threw yellowish dirty shadows on their faces.

## X

THERE was a dreadful noise in the Reschkes' cellar, such a clamour and such abuse that the servant-girls in the shop in front, waiting to be served, pricked up their ears and stole cautiously

nearer to the glass door so as to lose nothing of what was going on in the sitting-room. They need not have gone on tiptoe; those inside were not thinking of eavesdroppers, they saw and heard nothing. Mrs. Reschke's face was burning and swollen, her eyes had almost disappeared, and she waved her arms about excitedly.

"Where were yer?" she screamed at her son, who stood before her, pale, with bent knees and without uttering a sound. And then again, "Where were yer?" She seized him by the lapel of his coat and shook him so that the books which he had tucked under his arm fell to the ground with a bang.

"Where were yer?" screamed Reschke too. "Look 'ere!" He flourished a letter under his son's eyes. "Everythin' comes out. I'll teach you to stay away from school, yer cursed brat! Wot 'ave you been doin' with yerself? An' where's the school-money? I'm to send the money for the last month! I've paid it; where—where is't? You——!"

"The money!" shrieked his mother. "Didn't I give it yer the first o' the month out of the till? Marie was there fetchin' some o' the fine sort o' pears."

"The money! Answer!"

No answer. His head sunk on his breast, Arthur stared before him.

Mrs. Reschke put her arms akimbo. "Now then, look sharp—wot 'ave you done with it?"

Not a sound.

"Wollop 'im, Reschke! Give it 'im! Will you speak? If yer don't begin I'll help you!"

Arthur ducked his head under the blows from his father's fist.

"Now then—or——!"

The boy put his hand in his pocket and with trembling fingers brought out some money; the two old people pounced on it like birds of prey.

Mrs. Reschke counted aloud, "One, two, three, four—two shillings missing! Wot 'ave you done with them? Answer!" She stamped on the floor.

"Answer," roared Reschke.



“You liar, you deceiver, you thief!”

“Will yer ’and over the two shillings?” The father rushed at his son and rained down blows upon him in blind rage. The young fellow made no resistance, he only held his hands before his face to protect it. The blows fell like hail accompanied with torrents of abuse.

“Where’s the money? The money?” The mother looked, too, as if she would fall upon her son. But her uplifted arm was arrested. Arthur had wrenched himself free and looked at her with defiance, born of the anguish of despair. He screamed—  
“The money?—boozed it!”

Such a storm broke out, such cursing followed that Ella, who had been standing by in her precocious way, took refuge on the arm of the sofa, and Maggie, trembling, crept into the darkest corner of the potato-cellar. There she crouched by the dogs with her fingers in her ears, big tears falling from her eyes.

Arthur had played truant. He had hurried away in the morning with his books under his arm, had returned at noon with his books under his arm. At first he was always afraid of being discovered; every moment he thought he caught sight of a master or school-fellow in the crowded streets. Then he ran out of the town to the desolate fields and wandered about shivering in the dull, grey, November weather; he got as far as the Park and lay about on the deserted seats in the Zoological Gardens. But the rustling of the fallen leaves under his feet made him shudder; strange thoughts came to him in his loneliness. Bad weather, a feeling of emptiness in stomach and heart drove him back to the streets, to his fellow-creatures. There he lounged along the pavement, leant against the brass bars before the shop-windows, and with big hungry eyes watched the bustle of the great city. In out-of-the-way taverns, among vagabonds and idlers, he warmed himself, and with his elbows on the table, his head on his hands, slept with his eyes wide open and yet heard every word of the conversation.

This had gone on till a letter from the head-master, inquiring after the absentee, brought the matter to light.

The Reschkes were at daggers drawn. He reproached her with “her” Arthur, and she, in spite of her fury, took her son’s

part. Had she not brought thirty-five pounds with her when she married? She owed it to the Doctor that Arthur was treated with consideration.

One word led to another. The shop was common property, the kitchen pitch-dark, and so they quarrelled in the room where Ella thumped on the piano, and Arthur, who had been turned out of school once for all, stood about idle and bit his nails.

The air was heavy with thunder in the cellar.

Only Gertrude was in good spirits. She dressed more "chic" than ever. Every moment she had a new tie, a belt in the latest fashion, a comb to fasten up her carefully waved hair.

She came home later and later. Formerly, when closing-time had been delayed or she had gone for a walk with her comrades in the cool of the evening, so refreshing after the hot air in the shop, exhausted by the innumerable jets of gas, she felt rather frightened and knocked timidly at the blue varnished door; now she drummed on it energetically and, as if her coming home so late was quite an understood thing, went straight to bed without making any excuse.

And strange to say, Mother Reschke, who at one time would immediately have scented something improper, now shut both eyes. Her daughter was in such high feather, blossomed like a rose—"she must 'ave 'er optics on sum'un extra special!"

Gertrude had made his acquaintance in the shop. He had come there with his mother, an elegantly dressed woman, who made some costly purchases. Gertrude had not avoided the young man's eyes when he stared at her across the counter. She moved about lightly, tripped gracefully backwards and forwards, and when she lifted down the boxes from their compartments in the wall, raised her arms higher than necessary to show how slight and supple her young figure was. The red blouse, with a little, black gentleman's tie, suited her to perfection.

The jet-black eyes of the young man flashed under their heavy lids. Now he cleared his throat—she looked up for a second—he smiled—she bent over the box of lace, turned over the contents, it was a long time before she found what was wanted.

In the evening when she left the shop, arm in arm with one of the girls, he was walking up and down outside. He raised his

hat slightly. She turned round to look at him. He followed them as far as Café Josty, always close at their heels.

Next evening Gertrude Reschke came out of the shop alone.

In one thing Gertrude was too "odd," as Leonard Selinger expressed it, she would only take trifles from her Leo. "Why should I?" she said with an expression which made her pretty face appear less commonplace. "I love you for yourself!"

Yes, she loved him. What bliss it was to stroll with him of an evening under the dark trees which effectually screened them from observation. For the first time in her life she was warm at heart. When he kissed her, she stood embarrassed and trembling as if she had never grown up in a cellar. Every morning she hastened past his house her eyes rested lovingly on the stately row of windows—he was still sleeping. And she blew a kiss into the air, her heart beat, an inexpressible feeling of exultation came over her—he was so charming! She recalled his voice, his mouth, his moustache, his whole elegant appearance. A hundred times in the day she looked at her watch—would evening never come?

Gertrude Reschke became dreamy and gentle. Maggie was grateful for this, she was no longer thumped and cuffed in their bed on the kitchen table. And so she was willing to do anything to please her sister; however late she drummed at the blue varnished door Gertrude could depend upon the child being there like the wind to open it.

Maggie sat patiently in the cellar on the inverted tub. Round about dense darkness, a damp cold which penetrated into the marrow of the bones. A mouldy smell ascended from the baskets of roots and cabbage, from the piled-up potatoes; a rotting, dreary smell of withering green stuff, of decaying life. From the walls came a low sound of slow-falling drops; in the dark corners was a cracking and crackling, a rippling and rustling. Close by snores, like the grating of a saw; in between what seemed to be the whining of a puppy—it was Ella who whimpered in her sleep.

The lonely girl shuddered and clasped her hands on her lap. Her limbs were stiff with cold, her head as heavy as lead. With tired eyes she stared into the black night. Her gaze became

more intense, her vision widened—did not the darkness disperse, the vaulted ceiling open?

A blue sky shone down upon her, it parted, and there was Jesus Christ in glory.

. . . “Lo, I am thy friend! I am thy brother! For thee I came, for thee I died, for thee, for thee! Come to me, to-day, now, in this moment, save thy soul!” . . .

With a cry the friendless child sank on her knees and stretched out her hands, inexpressible longing in her look, trembling surrender in every limb.

“Is my name there written  
Before the golden throne?  
Hallelujah—Jesus—Hallelujah!  
Is my name there written  
In the book of the Lamb?”

No answer. The vision had passed. The cellar was a yawning grave—oh, so cold, so empty, so lonely. The smell of decay became stronger, the voices of the night more ghostly.

Weeping, Maggie lisped something unintelligible in unintelligible language. Indescribable excitement had taken possession of her, an inexplicable feeling seized her—was it joy, was it pain? She folded her hands convulsively. To go there! There, where the pearly gate beckoned, where “He,” the Friend and Brother, stood! To rest at His feet, to touch His garment: Save me, save me!

Quarter of an hour after quarter of an hour passed, half hour after half hour; Maggie no longer felt how slowly the time crept by.

It was long past midnight when Gertrude knocked; she sprang lightly over the step under which the hidden bell lay in wait.

She had been in a night café where “he” had treated her to chocolate and cakes and had forgotten the time there. Now her wavy hair was disordered. Her pulse fluttered against the thin, icy-cold fingers of her sister; her rustling skirts gave out a strong smell of cigars.

Without a word the younger led the elder carefully through the impenetrable darkness.

And Gertrude went on knocking late at her parents’ door, which was opened as patiently as ever by Maggie.

Thus the winter passed.

Arthur had no pleasure in his life at home. It had been better at school : at times he longed to be there again. At least he had been able to sit still there and stare over his book into space. Now it was perpetually, Arthur here, Arthur there ! Without any fixed occupation, he was Jack-of-all-trades. His mother liked best for him to be in the shop. There he had to stand among the baskets, weigh potatoes, recommend the vegetables, and, most important of all, carry on with the girls. Father Reschke understood that indeed quite well, but still a young fellow was better. Hair curling on the temples, and a sprouting moustache are more attractive. Mother Reschke gave her Arthur encouraging nods and winks, and if he was not smart enough he was scolded. "The stupid fellow, 'e'd never get on, 'e'd no eye for business."

He listened moodily, every day more so. Getting up in the morning was dreadful enough. When it was still pitch-dark his father knocked him up, he had to accompany him to the Central Market Hall. Going there was not so bad, it was still so early ; but he came home with downcast eyes, red and white by turns. Suppose he should meet one of his former school-fellows ! He started nervously when he heard a step close behind him—an unnecessary fear, they would not recognize him by the side of the truck ! With a feeling of unspeakable bitterness he looked at the handsome house-fronts—he lived in a *cellar*.

Sometimes he went to see Mina, for when she came to the cellar they could only exchange a glance of understanding. At least she gave him sympathy. He was not allowed in the captain's kitchen, so he crept up the back-stairs in the dusk like a thief, and knocked furtively at the door where a visiting-card was nailed over the peg for brushing clothes—

*von Saldern,*  
*Captain.*

Then Mina came out to him. On the draughty landing, behind the half-open door, they whispered together. With one ear Mina listened for a sound in the flat ; if a bell rang inside she rushed in : "Wait, Arthur ! I'll be back in a moment !"

And he stood outside and waited.

Only a few jets of gas were lighted in the back of the house, and these flickered in the draught, concealing more than they discovered. If an unsteady, stumbling foot was heard coming up-stairs, he drew back into the corner; he did not want to be seen standing behind the kitchen door like a beggar. And he abused Mina's mistress to himself for keeping her so long.

While Mina came back his abuse became loud, of those inside, father, mother, the whole world.

She listened with a troubled face. "Yes, it is so, you must put up wi' it. Some have a better life, others worse, but if yer look well, it's no pleasure nowhere. For example, my missus, she's a hard time wi' the children, an' everything's to look fine; only master has meat at the end of the week."

"What's your mistress to me? Let 'em eat what they like. But I won't stand it any longer! If things don't alter, I can't stand it!"

"Oh, Arthur," she said quite sadly, took his hand and held it between her own, "don't be so! Try once more! What will ye do? It isn't so bad, an'——"

She broke off, somebody came up the stairs. They separated hastily like a couple caught in a rendezvous; she slipped back into her kitchen, and he stole softly down the many steps.

He had to go to work at the mangle directly; he got home; formerly Peters had been so gallant as to turn it for the girls, but he had left the captain's, gone back to the front, and the new soldier-servant was much stupider, as Mrs. Reschke said. Heaped-up baskets were waiting; Arthur's arms got stiff. The mangle squeaked and creaked incessantly. Arthur exerted himself to the utmost to turn it, the drops of perspiration rolled from his forehead. His pale cheeks flushed. With every movement his long locks of hair fell over his face; Mrs. Reschke's maternal vanity would not allow him to cut it.

Ella struck up—

"That is Arthur  
With the curly wig,  
With the handsome locks,  
With the long love-locks——"

And the girls sang in a jubilant chorus—

“The handsome man  
Touch him who can !”

A wild excitement seized him, he dropped the handle and dashed into the knot of screeching women. He chased them between the baskets ; Father Reschke joined in the fun and with outstretched arms blocked the way of the scurrying girls, while Mother Reschke, from behind the counter, smiled approvingly on her lively son.

The place rang again with the screams and laughter. Red and heated, the girls left the Reschkes' cellar ; red and heated, Arthur went to bed, his blood throbbled in his veins. Next morning his head ached, his limbs were heavy and tired.

Towards spring he fell ill.

“Anæmia,” said the doctor, and spoke of rickets which the patient had suffered from as a child. “He must have healthy occupation in the open air, with not too much exertion !”

Yes, where was that to be found ?

His mother wept with anxiety. She no longer allowed her Arthur to accompany the old man to the market.

“It's your fault,” she screamed at her husband. “The poor fellow 'ad to git up at all hours ! 'E's only got 'is cough from that !” And she wrapped up her Arthur, made gruel for him every morning—she had done that for her “Doctor” too—and kept him in bed till ten or eleven.

There Arthur lay, stretched and tossed about ; it was impossible to sleep, the chattering and ringing in the cellar had been going on for hours. When at last he got up he shuffled into the sitting-room, his feet in slippers, his hands in his trousers-pockets ; from there into the shop and back again into the room ; he went into the kitchen, too, and turned up his nose over the contents of the saucepans on the fire, then he threw himself on the sofa, and yawned.

Or he played with Ella ; her precocious talk amused him at first ; he teased her, pinched her, pulled her hair, till her laughing changed to crying and she scratched his face.

The day was endless, the hours dragged. “He was to be much

in the open air," were the doctor's orders—but why should he? Arthur had no inclination to patrol the Park all alone, and watch the buds swell and burst, while on the other side of the way a military band played and beer-glasses clinked. Was that a pleasure, to stumble over hundreds of children in Victoria Park? Or to pass all the beer-gardens in the Hasenhaide and Grunewald without being able to turn in? There was no amusement to be had without money, and money he had not; there was none to be got out of Father Reschke, and the few pence his mother sometimes gave him did not count.

So he preferred to remain in the Göbenstrasse. For hours he stood on the topmost of the cellar steps, leaning against the blue varnished door, and sunned himself in the few rays which made their way over the tops of the high houses.

Only the pert and lively twitter of the sparrows, the noise of children playing in the street, and the green-red sticks of rhu<sup>h</sup>arb which lay there for sale, announced the coming of spring.

## XI

SUMMER had come with a rush. Along the promenades the limes were in blossom, and in the squares the bushes of the large-flowered syringa; the hot sun brought out the strong, sickly perfume, the air of the city was heavy with it. Watering-carts rattled along incessantly, the windows were wide open, young girls in light dresses made the streets look bright and cheerful.

Bertha was very comfortable in her situation in the Potsdamer Strasse. She knew how to get on with her mistress; you could do anything with her by means of skilful flattery, applied at the right moment, but it had to be so delicate that it could only be guessed at. Bertha had a good deal of liberty, much more than at the captain's, for Mrs. Selinger and her son often went to the Exhibition Park, to the races, and twice a week, as a rule, to the concerts in the Zoological Gardens. If their mistress was out, why should the servants stay at home? Nobody troubled about



them. All that was expected of them was that they should do their work, and of Bertha that she should wait on her mistress to her satisfaction, in a neat, pretty dress and with a smiling face.

There was indeed not much chance of saving here either, the pink washing dresses, the spotless white aprons and caps cost not a little; at the end of the week she always had a bill of a few shillings at the laundry. Mrs. Selinger paid high wages, and could therefore expect her housemaid to have a clean dress every day. Bertha had neither time nor inclination to get up her things herself, to goffer the flounces, to crimp the ruches. Besides, there was nothing her mistress disliked more than the steam of washing and ironing. But what did the few shillings matter—whether you had them or not? Live and let live!

There was only one thing that Bertha did not like in the long run: that was the food. She had come from the captain's really starved; her eyes devoured the dishes the first time she put them on the table. The greatest delicacies! And the dessert! Puddings, almonds and raisins and all kinds of little tarts. Young Selinger liked sweet things and his mother too.

In the spring they had the first vegetables, chickens, young geese, and strawberries which were still sold in a cardboard box; small quantities of everything and only intended for the dining-room. In the kitchen they had stringy meat, with all the goodness boiled out—soup was made for the dining-room every day—and a cheap vegetable. Bertha soon lost her appetite for this; she threw her portion into the ash-bucket and quarrelled with the cook over the scrapings of the pots. The enamel suffered from her endeavours to get off every bit left on the bottoms or sides, she ate the smallest particles from the plates that came out of the dining-room, and at last she licked her fingers. She sucked and sucked at them; an invincible desire tormented her. When she carried the sweets along the corridor she dipped her finger quickly into the crême, before the dining-room door she popped something from a dessert dish into her mouth.

She had been better off in this way at the poverty-stricken captain's; if there happened to be pudding—it was, indeed, only a tasteless blancmange with a watery fruit sauce—what was left came into the kitchen. Mrs. Selinger considered it the duty of a

good housewife to look after everything that was left over from dinner or supper herself. And so with a great clattering of keys she locked up the dessert dishes in a compartment of the carved sideboard, and put the keys back carefully into a little basket she always carried about with her.

Like a lustful cat, with sparkling eyes, Bertha prowled round the sideboard ; she could not go through the dining-room without giving a longing sniff. Oh, how good that smelt ! She pressed her teeth together as if she would bite through a lump of sugar, the water ran into the corners of her mouth.

There had been apricot-tarts for dinner to-day, like scented gold the fruit lay on the crisp puff paste. Bertha was now standing before the locked cupboard—she had been there about a quarter of an hour—two tarts were inside. She fancied she could smell them through the wood. From the open window came the noise of the late afternoon, the rolling of the trams, the ringing of the electric cars carrying people in need of fresh air into the Park ; a wasp found its way in, buzzed round the cupboard door and hummed in Bertha's face. But she saw and heard nothing, her thoughts were with the tarts.

Young Mr. Selinger was getting ready to go out ; his moustache had occupied him for some time. He walked up and down his room in his shirt-sleeves—the shirt was silk, elaborately made with plaits in front—pulled out one drawer after the other and slammed it to again. He had rung—did not Bertha hear ? Impatiently he kept his finger on the button of the electric bell.

At last she came.

“ Why don't you attend to the bell ? ”

“ I was with mistress ! ”

“ Of course. You never have time for me ! ”

She laughed pertly. “ What am I to do ? ”

“ Fasten my tie, help on my coat, brush me ! ” He liked her to wait upon him.

She knew where he kept his things quite well, and without disarranging anything soon found a suitable tie. Her pink skirt rustled, when she leant towards him he could admire her slight and yet full figure ; he looked down on her quick fingers with

much satisfaction while she passed the cravat under his collar, and fastened it in front.

“Has mamma visitors?”

“Yes, Miss Meyer! I heard Mrs. Selinger say, ‘My son will be here in a moment!’”

“That he won’t! I’m going out. Quick, Bertha, my coat!”

She held it out to him, but instead of slipping his arms into it, he pinched her soft cheek. “You’re a jewel, Bertha!”

She dodged him cleverly. “Oh!”

“Now then, don’t be offended all at once!”

“Pinching’s not allowed!” She laughed at him saucily, showing all her dimples.

Was she not splendid? Only a country girl is so fresh and rosy! He looked at her with pleasure. “I say, Bertha, what sort of a young man have you got? Over head and ears in love with you, eh?”

“I haven’t got a young man.”

“Haha!”

“I haven’t.” She was quite angry. “Ain’t so stupid! Those of my station are much too common, and a better sort”—she gave a little affected laugh—“wouldn’t have me.”

“That depends,” he said with a smile and stroked his full chin. His eyes drank in her charms. “If you were willing!”

“But I’m not.”

“Thought so—mamma is right, you’re a pattern of virtue.” Tilting his hat on the side of his head with his right hand, he waved condescendingly to her with his left. “Well, perhaps later you’ll think differently!” On the threshold he turned round a moment: “Tell mamma I’ve gone out!”

“But my mistress is waiting for you!”

“Am sorry, I’m bound to go out.” Whistling, he slammed the door to.

She made a grimace behind his back; she’d be likely to take up with him! Then she whipped to the window and looked down. Whom would he be going out with?

He crossed over the street hastily. His yellow shoes, light suit, white straw hat, the red carnation in his button-hole could

be seen from a distance. Some young girls turned round to look at him. Geese! Bertha curled her lips disdainfully.

Turning back into the room, she began to tidy it. In doing so she did not omit to examine all the drawers in his dressing-table, and the compartments of his writing-table. The other day she had found a bag of delicious sweets, she had enjoyed them immensely; to-day, to her disgust, she discovered nothing, nothing at all, however much she rummaged among his collars and ties, gloves and letters. She had to content herself with a remnant of liqueur in a cut-glass decanter standing by the side of the young fellow's empty coffee-cup.

After having taken a dash of eau de cologne and a handful of cigars out of the box she left the room with a last longing, searching look round.

At the corner, behind the Kaiserhof, Leo Selinger met his little girl. She was tripping up and down quickly and excitedly; she had left the shop in a great hurry for fear of coming too late. She had been able to get off earlier to-day. Now she rushed at him with such a beaming face, "Leo, here I am!" that he pressed her arm warningly: "Gently!"

Strolling along by her side, he took stock of her. By Jove, she was pretty! He had never thought she would turn out so good-looking; many would envy him his luck. How well the simple piqué frock suited her! The full body, large sailor collar, showing the white throat in front, the broad black belt made the young undeveloped figure look as slight as a boy's! She had something very young about her.

He smiled, well satisfied. "Well, sweetheart, are you happy?"

She gave him a tender glance from under her white sailor hat. "Awfully!"

"Will you have anything to eat?"

"No, no, I'm not a bit hungry. I couldn't eat anything now. I'm too excited—afterwards!"

Little Gertrude was really excited. He was taking her to the theatre for the first time, to see *Youth*—he was not quite sure himself why he had chosen just this piece; and afterwards they would have supper somewhere.

For the first time she could stay out as long as she liked. Her

parents had gone for their yearly outing to Stralau with the club "Fidelitas," they would come back late, or rather early. Last year Gertrude had been one of the party, and they had finished up with coffee out of doors at sunrise. Her mother with Arthur and Ella had started at three o'clock; it was so seldom they had a treat, and they would make the most of it. Father Reschke followed them in the evening; it was the one time in the year that the shop closed earlier. Only Maggie remained at home.

Gertrude laughed gaily as she told her Leo how difficult it had been to get out of this excursion.

"I had to tell mother a lot of lies. We had a row. But what does it matter? Now I can stop out with you!"

Carried away by a rush of tenderness, she pressed nearer to him; they walked so close together that at every step her dress flapped against his knee. She knew that she must not take his arm in daylight, but this evening in the dark—oh yes!

He teased her. "What about the Stralau young men, Gertie? You might have picked up an admirer there!"

"Them!" She blushed deeply and curled her lips. "Don't!"

"Now, what's the matter? You're offended!"

"No—o," she said hesitatingly. But it was to be seen that she was hurt.

He laughed. "But, Gertie, how can you! As if you were so prudish!"

It was a strange look she gave him; there was shamefacedness in it, reproach, and at the same time devotion.

"You're not to say such things," she murmured, and let her head fall on her breast. "Don't—not to-day!" She sighed; and now she caught at his arm and pressed it. "You know I love you!"

"That's right! Now—let go! And come, Gertie, we are going to enjoy ourselves this evening!"

He was not quite sure if she did enjoy herself. In the darkened parquet of the theatre on the Schiffbauer Damm she sat close up against him and secretly held his hand. With wide-open eyes she followed everything that passed on the stage; her ears burned and were fiery red, her face became paler and paler.

In the interval he took her into the restaurant. He could risk that, as most of his friends were away for the summer, and if any one did see him—well, she was an awfully chic girl.

She refused to eat anything, she would only drink; she was parched with thirst; she took the large beer-glass in both hands and emptied it at a draught.

As they made their way back through the crowd in the foyer, after the last warning bell had sounded, and he put his arm lightly round her to push her forwards, she drew it closer. He noticed how her slight body trembled; through her thin summer dress he could feel the pulses of her warm flesh. He had thought at once she was the right sort!

From this *Youth* on the stage a hot, sultry breath escaped and brooded over the parquet; a strange perfume, of lilac and syringa, flowering in dark arbours in a close, growing, spring night.

He pressed Gertrude's hand, which trembled in his, and bent close to her hot ear. "Gertie, dearest Gertie!"

She lowered her lashes, tears were on them. He had never seen her weep, always with a merry face. He was going to tease her, but became very embarrassed and looked round shyly—it was dreadful how she sobbed.

"But, Gertie."

She pressed his hand convulsively and bit her handkerchief. The tears streamed down her cheeks, she could not stop them. What a good thing that the last act was over.

Crowding along to the exit, he said half mockingly, half with some pity, "Little goose!" She was laughing again, and clung to his arm with a happy face.

"I was stupid, wasn't I?"

"I should think so. I can tell you what, if I had known you were going to cry I should never have brought you here. Call that a treat!"

She nodded energetically. "But it was; I've enjoyed myself awfully. I've had a regular good cry; that'll last for a long time. Oh, Leo, it was grand"—she gave a trembling sigh—"very grand." Clenching her teeth she shivered, "But now let's go."

"You're tremendously hungry, I expect? So am I. Come along! I'm going to treat you to champagne to-day."

She clapped her hands. "Oh, how fine! I've always wanted to taste it." But then she was silent, a cold shudder ran through her. "Let's walk about a little first," she begged hesitatingly.

He did as she wanted, and took her slowly along by the river. The stream of people had dispersed, they were quite alone. He pressed her into a dark doorway and kissed her again and again. She returned his kisses breathlessly, her hot lips clung to his.

Whispering tenderly they strolled on.

The Marshal Bridge rose massively before them, solitary lamps threw wavering circles and bright spots on the black moving water. Against the walls of the quay the waves splashed and gurgled. A damp chilliness was in the air there. The two solitary wanderers moved on, their footfalls sounding muffled in the silence of the night.

"Leo," said Gertrude suddenly, and laughed softly, "it was lucky for Annie that her crazy brother shot her."

"No, that's just the weak part in the play," corrected Leo.

"I don't see it; she couldn't jump into the river, that's much too common. Most of them do that. D'you know, I knew a girl, she often came to our shop to buy things, and she jumped into the canal, not far from Potsdam Bridge. Her brother sold her clothes afterwards to the Grummachs—they have a second-hand shop in our street. I saw them hanging in the window for a long time. Horrid!" She shuddered. "How can one do that?"

"Do talk of something else," he said, unpleasantly impressed. "It's ghastly."

She laughed again, and then stood still precipitately, bringing him also to a standstill. With an inarticulate sound, half laugh, half sigh, she threw both arms round his neck and kissed him passionately.

"Ah——!"

"But, Gertie, Gertie, suppose somebody should come." He looked round apprehensively. "Every one can see up here."

"I don't care," she stammered, and hid her head on his breast.

## XII

MINA sat on the bench in her kitchen, rested her elbow on the stove, her head on her hand, and stared into the smouldering embers of the fire. Her right hand, which lay idle on her lap, held a letter. It was from home. In the fading daylight she had deciphered it with difficulty. Her father wrote as if he had scratched it with a broomstick. Mollie was no longer at home, since her confirmation she was nursemaid at Golmütz Farm, in return for food and clothing. It was the first letter Mina had had from home for three months; she was not astonished at this, it was harvest-time, and they had their hands full. But now her father was angry, and in very plain words expressed his indignation that his daughter had sent no savings home for a long time.

“We’d like to buy a cow. Why! a big daughter in Berlin wot can’t send her wages home. They’s as safe there as in the Savings Bank. But yer thinks little o’ your parents and wot they’ve all done for ye.”

And so on.

With a gloomy look Mina watched the sparks slowly expire. Now the ashes were quite dark, quite dead. Sighing deeply, she rose and stretched her stiffened arms above her head. Then she walked heavily into her bedroom.

It looked very different to what it did in Bertha’s time. No candle-droppings on the chair and floor, no paper-back novel thrown hastily into the drawer, the torn cover hanging half out.

Everything in perfect order.

Only two coloured pictures over the bed Mina had thought too beautiful to banish, a girl in knickerbockers, leaning against her cycle—advertisement of the Continental Tyre Company—and a dandy with an enormous moustache—Plumeyer’s matchless Preparation for producing this manly ornament.

Now she knelt before her basket and slowly raised the lid. Deep down, under all the other things, was a string-box; she took it out and cautiously unscrewed the lid. Silver money clinked inside, there was one gold piece too; she took out one coin after



the other, and carefully counted each piece on to her lap. She did it with a certain reverence; for her the money was sacred, every penny had been earned with the sweat of her brow.

“Five shillings—ten shillings—fifteen—twenty!” she murmured. And now—she beamed—a piece of gold. If Bertha would only give her back what she owed her she would have at least ten shillings more. Mrs. Reschke, too, had borrowed three shillings of her the other day; she had had no small change in the till. And it cost something when she went out with Arthur; she could not let the poor fellow, who had nothing himself, treat her. So she gave him her purse: “Here, you pay.”

However much she counted and added up the small coins that came rattling out of the box, it did not come to much more: twenty-six shillings!

With loving eyes she looked down on the little heap. And she was to give it all away, no longer be able to get it out on quiet evenings and count it over joyfully and proudly! No longer hold it in her hands, those hands that were hard and rough from earning.

She bit her lips and looked round with a hard expression. They wanted to buy a cow with her money, and she would have not a drop of milk from it. Had they sent *her* anything from home? Not a crumb. No, the money should stop here!

She pressed it between her roughened palms, and felt it with the tips of her fingers, which were cracked from plate-washing.

The whole evening she was moody and abstracted. She had a bad conscience. Irresolutely she went back into her room, took the money out, put it away again.

She felt undecided and pulled in two directions; in her pre-occupation she laid the table for afternoon coffee instead of for supper, and put a child's mug by her master's plate. When her mistress spoke to her she started; her poor head was so full of heavy thoughts.

“It is dreadful how inattentive Mina is,” Mrs. von Saldern complained to her husband. “I should like to know what she has in her head instead of thinking of her work. It is only because to-morrow is her Sunday out. Perhaps, after all, she has a lover.” The captain could not help a sigh: “It's all over with her then.”

The children had nothing better to do than to run into the kitchen where Mina knelt on a newspaper spread over the floor and polished the brasses. She rubbed hard and perspired freely; a damp lock of hair fell over her forehead, the rolled-back sleeves of her cotton blouse showed the big muscles on her strong, coarse-skinned arms.

"Mina," said the precocious Dicky, and planted himself in front of her, "have you a lover?"

"I?" She looked up startled; the stove-door, which she had just polished so brightly, reflected her perplexed face.

"Yes; mamma said it would be better for you to think of your work. And papa said it was all over with you then. Yes, he did."

The boy nodded importantly and ran away, dragging his little brother and sister behind him.

"A lover!" Had she a lover? She had only been out a few times with Arthur this summer. Once in the Park, once on the Spree Terrace at Jannowitz Bridge, and once to hear the Stettin Singers. They had sat stiffly side by side, their beer-glasses before them. Arthur had only put his arm on the back of her chair.

She flushed crimson and felt a pang at her heart. Was he her lover?

She was awake long in her narrow bed that night. Generally she lay there like a log and never moved, often she did not hear the rattling of the alarum in the morning; now she had thrown her bare arms above her head and sighed uneasily. When at last sleep came it was Arthur's figure she saw in her dream. No, she could not send the money to them at home; who should pay the reckoning on Sundays then?

But she seemed to hear a hollow murmur close to her ear: "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land . . ."

Again she sat in the village school, the school-master struck the table with his stick: "Once more! All together! That—thy days—may—be long—in the land . . ."

She started up in sudden terror. Yes—she must send the money home, that she and Arthur might have the blessing.

In the pale grey starlight of the summer night she crept out of bed and groped her way barefoot to the basket ; from the lowest depths she brought out her treasure, clinked the coins together, and let them glide through her fingers one by one.

Very early, before the post was closed for Sunday, she carried all her money there. With a trembling hand she pushed it through the little window to the official. She stood a long time before the door of the post-office ; she could have wept. It was gone, and with it the comforting certainty of help in time of need.

She remained sad till, about five in the afternoon, a familiar whistle sounded from the courtyard. She was standing before the little glass in her room, putting the last touches to her finery ; she nearly swallowed the pin she had between her teeth, she popped her head out of the window so quickly. It was his signal.

Hastily she jammed her hat on her head, seized her thread-bare gloves and sunshade, and clattered down the back-stairs. He was no longer in the court, but standing by the lamp-post in the street. He came to meet her, his straw hat pushed on to one ear, his walking-stick under his arm, a cigar in the corner of his mouth ; his wide trousers flapped elegantly round his legs.

“Arthur !” She turned first red, then pale.

“Evenin’, Mina.” He gave her his hand, and she saw a large signet-ring on his forefinger.

“New ?” she asked admiringly.

“New,” he repeated carelessly, and at the same time placed himself before her, as if he would say, “Admire me !” Now only she saw how smart he was. In a light suit that she had never seen before and brown walking-shoes ; a pale blue tie with white spots fluttered from under his collar, over his chest dangled a watch-chain with all sorts of charms on it. Like a fine gentleman ! She stood with her mouth open, she was so astonished.

“Smart, eh !” he said with secret pride, and tapped his trousers with his stick. “Everything on tick ! But what am I to do ? I must be dressed suitably to my station. From to-morrow I write out legal documents at Lawyer Sieboldt’s in the Jägerstrasse. Forty-five shillings a month to begin with, afterwards more.

Handsome Augusta who went there from our street got me the place. I'm glad to have a little peace and quiet at last. And I'll learn to cycle, too, now."

"You *have* luck!" She clasped her hands with delight, and at the same time felt special satisfaction that he, the fine gentleman, should still take her out.

"Where'll we go?" she asked, abashed and happy.

"Yes, where?" He flourished his stick energetically. "Anywhere where there's lots going on. We'll enjoy ourselves for once. Never mind what it costs."

Her heart sank. "I've no money," she said dejectedly.

He looked at her speechless.

Her head sank on her breast, raise her eyes she dare not. "Yes, yes, yer can believe me," she murmured. "I ha' sent it home to-day." She could not keep back her tears; half choked, she brought out, "All of it."

"Damnation!" He stamped on the ground, but when he saw her grieved face he laughed, embarrassed.

"I—h'm—haven't any either."

They stood in the street quite dumfounded. Now the sun appeared. Across, from the Botanical Gardens, came sweet scents and the rustling of green trees. Children, dressed in white, skipped along on the hand of their parents, smartly dressed girls strolled past with their lovers. The open trams dashed by with a friendly ting-ting, the Sunday clothes of the passengers making the cars look as if flagged with gay streamers; the rolling of the wheels sounded more melodious, they seemed to run more smoothly in the joy of Sunday. Everywhere Sunday faces, eyes which sparkled in expectation of Sunday joys. The people hurried along, happy to have thrown off the trammels of the week-day. Sunday air, a Sunday sky. Innumerable atoms of gold danced in the air, the asphalt looked as if sprinkled with gold.

No money! With a deep sigh they gazed at one another. "What can we do?" whispered Mina.

He rummaged in his pocket, and after a long search brought out something and held it out to her in the palm of his hand. "There, twopence-halfpenny! Twopence-halfpenny in cash. That's just enough for two beers, and a halfpenny for the waiter.

*I don't care. Come, let's go to the park at Wilmersdorf, it isn't far, we needn't take the tram."*

Her face lighted up ; he went out with her, although she had no money ! She nodded blissfully, and trudged along by his side, her heavy woollen dress raising a cloud of dust.

Now they were out of the town, and had left the last houses in the Grunewald Strasse behind them.

An immeasurable plain lay before them ; no meadow, no wood. To the right and left uncultivated fields, already marked out as building sites. A light breeze played with the stunted sand-oats. No flowers. But boys were flying a kite and shouted with joy when the warm, summer wind, which yet gave warning of autumn, bore along their paper air-ship.

Mothers pushed squeaking perambulators in front of them, and fathers carried tired children. Young men and girls, their eyes sparkling with the thought of dancing, despised the roadway and balanced themselves on the heaps of stones and hillocks of sand on both sides of the way.

From the far distance, where an avenue of great trees rises from the edge of the plain, the wind brought the sound of music.

And over everything the sun poured its brightest beams.

With a face wonderfully beautified by happiness Mina gazed before her. They had never been so far out of the town before. She sniffed the country air with inflated nostrils. It was a long time since she had breathed anything like this ! It was always the steam of the kitchen, the smoke of the coals, the greasy reek of the sink.

Her heart trembled with a great joy ; she imagined herself at home on the green Golmütz Common, at home, and—with him. She could have rejoiced aloud. But she was ashamed ; so she only hopped over a little sandheap and said with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "It's beautiful here ! We can see the sky !"

"Yes, you can," grumbled Arthur, who was still in bad spirits ; "but that's about all !"

"Oh, do 'e be happy, Arthur," she entreated. "Ain't we together ?"

"H'm, you're right !" His discontented face cleared ; he

looked at her. Her straw hat trimmed with a whole parterre of roses sat boldly on her hair, which had gone rather a rusty colour from her constantly streaking it down with water. All the efforts of the curling-tongs were in vain ; it would not curl, only the ends turned up a little. Her black woollen dress was not exactly suitable for the time of year, she had bought it in the winter, but it was her very best. Such a black dress had always been her ideal.

She could not compare with the pretty girls who came along the road, but her cheeks were red, her figure rounded, and as straight as a tree which has grown in air and sun, and her eyes, brown, honest eyes, looked at him—Arthur saw that quite well—with mute admiration.

That flattered him. His spirits rose. He walked along by her swinging his stick like a regular gallant. He cocked his hat more and more on one side and let his signet-ring sparkle in the sun.

They very nearly had an encounter. A cyclist came spinning noiselessly along. Mina gave a piercing shriek when the bell sounded behind her. The cyclist endeavoured to turn out of her way, but she rushed just in that direction ; they came into collision, Mina was thrown on to a heap of earth, the cyclist flew from his wheel in a wide circle.

Arthur was furious : couldn't the fellow look where he was going ? He felt quite like the knight of his lady. He swore, the cyclist swore, Mina trembled—would they come to blows ? But when the cyclist saw that his wheel was not damaged he got on it and made off, and Arthur, pale and proud, his hat pushed back from his hot forehead, his stick raised threateningly, was left master of the field.

Mina clung to his arm.

“Come,” she begged, “let him be !”

He could not calm himself all at once. “Cursed fellow ! Ass ! Rowdy ! Let him dare do it again ! Cad !” But still he allowed her to pull down his arm with the raised stick. And then he beat the dust out of her dress and asked, “Are you hurt ?”

She pressed his hand gratefully and confidently : “Not a bit !”

Gallantly he offered her his arm, she took it happily. They had never done so before, they now walked arm in arm.

Along the avenue of great elms they approached the park. A loud military band was playing ; there was a dense crowd inside, one table next to another, the chairs close together. The mother swan and her young ones moved about excitedly on the lake. The music sounded most seductive ; girls, dressed in white, skipped about in the dancing-saloon, waiters hurried along, their coat-tails flying, uniforms sparkled in the sun, blue rings of smoke mounted into the air.

How beautiful it was ! Sunny air, the lake like a mirror, the people so gay !

Delighted they trudged to the entrance. There—" Admission one penny ! Grand military concert, children half-price," rattled off the man at the gate, and held a programme under their nose.

They retired involuntarily. Mina became crimson, but Arthur soon recovered himself. "Oh, thank you ; I see he's not there yet ! I must wait outside for a friend. Come, we'll go and meet him."

And he drew Mina away with him.

She was near weeping. The whole morning she had been on her legs, at least eight times she had run up and down the four flights ; the noonday sun, streaming in at the kitchen window, together with the heat of the fire, had almost roasted her. Now fatigue and thirst overcame her. Oh, if she could only sit down and rest her hot feet, which were so cramped in the Sunday boots !

She hung heavily on his arm.

" Damme ! " he murmured to himself. " Always money, miserable money ! I could knock everything to pieces."

She felt very guilty—why had she sent all her money home ?

Slowly, without speaking, they stumbled on. Unconsciously they sought solitude.

The pensioner with his harmonica, and an old woman with yellow plums and little cakes for sale, who had posted themselves at the entrance of a lane, were the last persons they saw.

Unmolested they made their way through the bushes. Now the path came to an end. Wide, silent, sunny fields lay before them.

Mina's misgivings vanished ; with a cry of delight she rushed

to a grassy ridge near, poppies and pimpernel were growing there. She plucked with both hands, and laughed out of the depths of her soul. She would stay here!

He dropped down discontentedly by her side, but soon it pleased him too. He stretched out his legs, put his head on her lap and gazed with blinking eyes at the blue, cloudless sky.

Far in the distance the harmonica piped monotonously, the strains of the military band, somewhat muffled, were borne to them here. They pricked their ears : that they had for nothing !

A feeling of rest and well-being came over the tired couple. There was a delicious smell here of earth, of potato-tops, of half-dried grass. A cricket chirped—then another—that was a concert too. And now the frogs began, sometimes high, sometime low ; they sang their love-songs in a pool near surrounded by bushes.

Otherwise quiet, peace, solitude, the Sabbath calm of the fields.

Arthur nestled closer to Mina ; he hid his face in her dress, the sun dazzled him. He put both arms round her waist.

She heard him breathe regularly and did not dare move ; she had put up her sunshade so that no ray of sun should disturb him. A heavy, drowsy feeling came over her too, a light mist rose before her eyes, she did not know that the sunshade fell from her hand.

Both slept.

A light breeze playing round Mina woke her up. Was it possible that they had been sitting here so long? A soft light had succeeded the blaze of the sun. The bare fields, the potato patches, the sandy paths were beautiful.

Mina's eyes filled with tears ; she thought of home, and yet she would not have been there now for anything in the world. She smiled, sighed gently, and with awkward tenderness passed her hand over Arthur's carefully arranged locks.

He woke up.

Now when she wanted to get up she found that her back was quite stiff and that she had a feeling of pins and needles in her feet. She screamed loudly, "Oh, my feet have gone to sleep."



He rubbed her ankles, and for fun gave her calf a little pinch ; ashamed, she drew her dress down lower and jumped up.

On the grass, by the place where the two had lain, the flowers they had picked withered unnoticed.

Hand in hand they wandered on.

A fine haze enveloped them as with a veil.

The whole world was silver-grey, silver the crescent moon on the waves of ether.

Something, as delicate as a breath, came borne along by the evening wind, and stole into their hearts.

From the park came languishing, long-drawn melodies ; Arthur began to hum the air—"The moon did shine on sea and shore." A beautiful cornet solo was heard. Mina listened, transported, leaning against Arthur.

He clasped her closer and kissed her so violently that he knocked her hat from her head. He would not let her go. "A kiss," he stammered, "give me a kiss ! Another !"

She let him do as he liked, she had no will of her own. The beautiful music, and the breath of the fields made her as thoughtlessly happy as a child in the meadows at home.

She laughed. He laughed. Chasing one another they ran along the grassy ridge. Now they were in the lane ; the old woman had gone, the man without legs was there, but he no longer played the harmonica ; his tired head drooping, he waited for his wife, his child, or the agent who should take him home.

The young couple raced past him. Suddenly Mina stopped. "Arthur, give him something !"

And Arthur brought out the halfpenny intended for the waiter, gave it to her, and she laid it on the cripple's harmonica.

Never in her life had Mina parted with a halfpenny so easily, she would willingly have given sixpence. A sudden sympathy for others had taken possession of her.

They went proudly by the park ; the many lamps gleamed in the dark like glowworms. The road was already full of people returning home, tired parents, tired children ; the evening was just beginning for the dancers.

They tried to avoid the crowd ; with interlocked arms they crept behind the others or stumbled along by the side of the road

between sand-hollows and brambles. Sometimes they stopped and looked at one another; they would like to have embraced, but Mina was shy—there were too many eyes! She repulsed him again and again.

So he only pressed her hand, her arm, her waist. Their faces glowed. The air was mild and bore on its wings roving scents from distant gardens. It had not rained for a long time, the country was dry, their throats too, their lips burned.

They turned into a little garden-restaurant, lying by the wayside. There was no amusement to be got in the "summer house," no music, no shows, no switchback, but the quiet little garden was just the place for them to-day. They found their way to the darkest corner and sat there quite close together; his right hand rested on her shoulder, she held his left hand between her two under the table.

They had finished their beer. New customers came, a whole stream of people on their way home poured in once more, all the tables were taken in a moment. The waiter began to throw angry glances at the couple in the corner; they had planted themselves down there, and scarcely ordered anything—"Miserable lot! Hadn't even given a halfpenny!" Intentionally he passed them again and again; now he pointed out their table to some people who had come in and were looking for places.

Then they fled.

"How long can you stay out?" whispered Arthur when they were standing under the dark trees of the avenue outside.

"I've the key—till twelve!"

It was only going on for ten.

"We won't go home yet, not for a long time," he whispered again and drew her arm closer through his. "Come! Isn't it much better here?"

"Yes," she sighed, and willingly allowed him to lead her on, farther and farther, deeper and deeper into the shade of the black trees. . . .

Two, three villas appeared, rising like shadows behind thick foliage. Behind the railings an oppressive scent of flowers—mignonette, stocks—then an endless, dark, lonely void, lighted by no stars.

Glowing cheek pressed against glowing cheek, hot breath trembling to meet hot breath. Side by side, shoulder against shoulder.

They passed on, deeper and deeper into the solitude, which seemed to belong to them, to them now quite alone.

### XIII

THE first of October was close at hand. The season for geese would soon be in full swing. Mother Reschke kept some in a pen in the sand and potato cellar. They were bought quite thin and bony from the dealer, were then fattened up—crammed—to be sold again as prime Oder geese. There was always a good profit to be made out of them, even if one, for want of light and air, or the effects of over-cramming, had to be killed in a hurry. Then they had goose for dinner. Mother Reschke was, as she said, "allus ready for a good snack," and Father Reschke, who had been brought up on sour milk and potatoes in their skins, would have given his soul for something good to eat.

Altogether they lived better at the Reschkes' lately. Mother Reschke, in spite of her stoutness, often felt shaky, dead tired too from constant standing and talking in the shop; it was wiser then to spend more on one's food than to carry the money to the chemist's. Things were often left over from the provisions in the shop, delicacies which did not sell so easily, but which one did not like to let spoil.

When the couple had gorged themselves they lay each in a sofa corner, like swollen boa-constrictors after feeding, and had a nap. The bell might ring in front ever so shrilly and warningly, it was not their business to serve in the shop now. They must be allowed to rest sometimes.

Ella then stood on a footstool behind the counter and with knowing eyes surveyed her charge. There was not much business doing at this time; at most a workman came over from the new building and fetched a cigar—since building had begun in the

neighbourhood the Reschkes had taken to keeping cigars, not that there was much to be made out of them—a halfpenny each!—but it prevented the men going to the cigar-shop.

The children round, especially the boys, came all the oftener for locusts and barley-sugar. Ella had many admirers among them, for she was not chary of her favours, and munificently distributed barley-sugar and liquorice, locusts and cough lozenges. If she liked a boy she was very generous to him. The counter was regularly stormed; many fights took place from jealousy. Then Ella clambered on to the counter and looked on with interest while her admirers thumped and bruised one another.

Mother Reschke was always very delighted at the run of customers Ella had. "That's a gel! You look out," she said to her husband; "she'll bring us custom. When she's growed up we're purvided for!"

Yes, Mother Reschke's children were quite out of the common, and she praised their virtues volubly to everybody who would listen or would not listen. "But we've done our duty by our children," she never failed to add. "My 'usband an' me we'd give all we 'ave to the children! Look at the food they 'ave. I owe it Arthur an' Gertrude, they pays for their board—not that it's much—but we ain't the parents to lay store by that!"

"A body must feed well," she said to Bertha, who came again that evening, as she often did, to complain of the food she got. "But my gracious, you are stoopid, Bertha! Why don't yer 'elp yourself? Don't it stand in the Bible: 'Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth o' the ox that treadeth out the corn'—'ere, Ella, 'ere's a choc'late! My children shan't say of me that I grudged 'em anythin'! Take one too, Bertha!" She held out a box with little slabs of chocolate to the girl, who took one greedily.

Oh, how good they were! Inside they were filled with pink cream; they melted on the tongue and slipped down the throat like balsam.

When Mrs. Reschke was called away for a moment and Ella ran after her, Bertha could not resist putting her fingers into the box again; Mrs. Reschke would not mind. Then again! And then—she passed her red tongue over her lips, and quickly counted the slabs of chocolate: one, two, five, ten! Oh, what a

quantity! She would not notice! She had already stretched out her hand—there—the sound of a footstep on the top step! Quick as lightning she drew back her hand, wiped her mouth and stood there with her fair, clear Madonna face.

It was Gertrude. What brought her home so early from business? Only just past eight. She came down the steps heavily, slowly, as if she were dead tired. Her hat was crooked, the veil put on carelessly. She seemed to have been crying. Her eyes looked like it.

“Good-evening,” she said mechanically, and went past Bertha without looking up.

“Now then?” She held out her hand. “Haven’t seen you for a long time, Miss Gertrude.”

“Ah—Bertha!” Gertrude started, a burning blush overspread her pale cheeks. “How are you? Still in the Potsdamer Strasse? At the Selingers’, isn’t it?” Her voice had a peculiar ring as she pronounced the name. “At the Selingers’, isn’t it?” In nervous haste, and as if driven, she went on questioning. “Is Mrs. Selinger pleasant? An’ her son, eh? Is he thinking of marrying, eh? D’you know the young lady? Is she young? Handsome?”

A shower of questions. And with every question a more burning flush on the thin cheeks, a more anxious curiosity in the reddened eyes.

How comical it was! Bertha looked her up and down and then said quietly, shrugging her shoulders—

“I don’t know.”

“Is he thinking of marrying? Is there any chance of it?”

“Not that I know. A young girl often comes to us, Miss Meyer; maybe Mrs. Selinger would like to make a match between ’em. But the young master don’t think of it, not he! No, I don’t believe it!”

“Why not, why not then?” burst out Gertrude.

“He does what he likes. He’s not goin’ to be ordered about!”

“Isn’t he? Really not? Oh——!” It sounded like a sigh of relief.

Gertrude stood there as if rooted to the spot. Bertha was

angry. If she would only take herself away. Why did she ask such stupid questions? There were the slabs of chocolate—oh, if she could put another into her mouth! Bertha had really a pang at her heart; the finest opportunity to take another was slipping away. She looked at Gertrude out of the corner of her eye, examined her excited face—aha, there was something not right there! She, Bertha, was not quite so stupid as not to notice anything; she was to be pumped. Well, she would pay her back for coming in her way here! She would frighten her away!

An evil smile hovered round Bertha's pretty mouth for a moment, then she put on an important look.

"Yes, I don't know, it just strikes me—Miss Meyer comes very often—an' my people are invited there a good deal——"

"You think, you do think there's something in it?" Gertrude drew a trembling breath.

Bertha shrugged her shoulders.

"Is she rich?"

"Rolling in money!"

"Young?"

"Scarcely sixteen!"

"And handsome?"

"Like a picture. Not quite so handsome as you! An' yet—a'most handsomer, Miss Gertie!"

Gertrude closed her eyes for a moment as if she were giddy, and clung to the counter with both hands.

Bertha watched her as a boy watches a May beetle he has at the end of a string. Had she had enough?

Gertrude stared at her blankly; she opened her mouth as if she would say something, but could not utter a sound. Then she rushed away.

At last! Bertha already licked her lips. But no, it was too late! Mrs. Reschke just opened the glass door, and Gertrude ran against her mother.

"Now then? Wot's the matter?" screamed Mrs. Reschke "Can't yer look where yer goin'? You're back a'ready? Why d'you always come so early now?"

"I have a headache," said her daughter in a low voice.

"Yer looks—well! It's no pleasure to look at yer. Like

white beer an' spittle. Wot's the matter? Do be a bit lively! A young girl don't git no 'usband, if she ain't lively!"

Gertrude struggled with her tears. Bertha saw her pale lips twitch with pain, and one of her sudden good-natured impulses came over her.

"Miss Gertrude is anæmic," she said, "an' that makes you feel very bad. Let her go to bed, Mrs. Reschke, that's the best place for her. Hope you'll be better soon, Miss Gertie!"

She gave her warm hand to the young girl and pressed her cold fingers vigorously.

Mrs. Reschke looked after her daughter with a shake of the head.

"I don't know wot's come over Gertrude! She was as lively as a cricket in summer, an' now—a weepin' willer. It's time she should settle down. D'you know, Bertha"—she leant over the counter and whispered confidentially to her behind her hand—"there's a new assistant across the road at 'Andke's, I tell ye, Bertha—a swell! 'E's from Kottbus, 'is father's a shop of 'is own there. 'E don't need to serve at 'Andke's, 'e only wants to see 'ow it is in the town. A charmin' fellow—altogether charmin'!"

When Bertha left the Reschkes' cellar she could not help going across to the opposite pavement, to have a look in at the grocer's shop. The new assistant at that instant opened the door and bowed out a customer.

This weak little man with projecting ears and hands as red as lobsters a charming fellow! Bertha pouted; then she thought of Gertrude, and her lips curled in a disdainful smile. She was gone on Mr. Selinger, that was clear. Good gracious, what a fuss they made about this love!

With proudly erect head and a quick elastic step she made for home. Many looked after the pretty girl whose hair under the white cap shone like gold in the lamplight.

She felt so lighthearted. If only the food was better! That was the one thing that troubled her. She had never thought that she could loathe beef as she did; now she not only put the stringy pieces into the ash-bucket, she spat afterwards. Faugh! Her stomach turned against it. She could not eat the cabbage that they had perpetually, nor the dry potatoes either. She always

sniffed about the oven when a pudding was browning for the dining-room. Something seemed to gripe her inside as if she were pinched with hunger, but it was no longer hunger, it was greed. At night it kept her awake. As a child she had often dreamt that she was sucking a sweet; then she had had a corner of the sheet in her mouth. That she dreamt again now. Or she dreamt of delicious fruit, hanging just over her—she stretched out her hand—and fell into a bottomless depth. Or she felt something sweet between her teeth, but before she could swallow it she awoke and had bitten into the pillow.

When Bertha came home her mistress had already asked for her. She hastened into the room and found Mr. Leo with his mother sitting in a comfortable arm-chair. Mrs. Selinger lay on the sofa, she had her key-basket on the majolica table by her side, on which was also the tray with empty tea-cups, and all the apparatus for tea.

“Did you ring for me, ma’am?” Bertha remained standing respectfully by the door; a cool, fresh breath of air blew from her into the middle of the room.

Mr. Leo scrutinized her.

“Bertha,” said her mistress excitedly, “it is really dreadful! I miss some of the preserves again; I put them away after dinner myself. And now when I would get them out for supper I am sure I can see finger-marks on the dish. It is horrid! It has made me quite ill!”

Bertha blushed deeply. “It is very disagreeable for me, ma’am, I really can’t help it!”

“I know, I know, my child, but I must ask you. I am quite unhappy. How can people do such things? This is the third cook I have had lately. Tell me, Bertha, have you noticed in any way that the new cook is dishonest?”

Bertha hesitated with her answer.

“I do hope, Bertha, that you have more regard for your mistress than you have for the servants. Tell me openly what you think!”

The girl fixed her beautiful blue eyes on her mistress. “I know what my duty to you is, ma’am. But I don’t want to throw suspicion on any one. I always thought Marie was



honest." She paused as if she were considering, and added quickly—"I think so still. I don't know how it is, I always think——" She hesitated.

"Well, what do you think?"

Bertha smiled astutely. "You must not be offended, ma'am, but you have so much to think of, and from one day to another you can forget what is in the cupboard. Not even we can remember so exactly!"

The son laughed. "Quite right! Mamma, would she take the trouble of stealing things out of your cupboard when they go through her hands in the kitchen?"

Bertha darted a quick, perplexed glance at the young man.

"You must look for the thief somewhere else, mamma!"

"But I bring in so much from the confectioner's," maintained Mrs. Selinger. "The petits fours the other day were from Hovell's, and now the preserves: French conserve from Lindstedt's."

Her son crossed his legs. "Well, and what if it was! Trifles, mamma!"

"I think too, ma'am, that you are mistaken," said Bertha seriously. And then she lifted the heavy silver tray with the tea things on it in her slender arms and carried it to the door. Her eyes, shaded by the golden eyelashes, were fixed attentively on it; not a spoon rattled.

#### XIV

A RATTLING of silver, clattering of china, clinking of glasses, popping of corks, the most appetizing odours. The Selingers had a party.

Bertha hastened like the wind from dining-room to kitchen, from kitchen to dining-room. Only a moment's delay before the door, a quick glance round, then two fingers dived into the cook's artistic erection, the hot tit-bit was gulped down in such a hurry that the tears came into her eyes, and it burnt like fire in her stomach.

For a fortnight Bertha had controlled herself, unsatisfied greed had almost made her ill ; now she could resist no longer ; enjoy, enjoy !

Her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled. Behind the waiter's back she had managed to taste some of the sweet wine that was served with the soup ; now she waited for the champagne. Mrs. Selinger would not be able to look after things to-day. What an amount of sweets there were among the flowers on the table ! Everything was in profusion : candied fruit and chocolate creams, petit fours and brandy cherries, ice wafers and little packets of cakes tied round with silk ribbon, Malaya grapes and French peaches, Sicilian mandarins and a Californian pineapple. And in the centre was a tall cake, like a tower of sweetness, covered with jagged points and crusted all over with sugar.

Bertha's eyes half closed and became misty when she looked at it. Her will felt paralyzed, her whole self melting away ; only one wish animated her—to break a point off the cake, to bite into it, to crunch the sugar.

She shook herself. She sighed deeply.

They would get some of these things in the kitchen to-day, there was so much there !

She gave Mrs. Selinger an evil look out of the corner of her eyes, when, after dinner was over and the guests had gone into the drawing-room, she remained behind to lock up the sweets. Bertha had to hand her all the little plates and dishes. She stood behind her mistress, who could hardly find room in the sideboard for all the treasures, and pressed her teeth together, while her mouth watered and her left hand clenched the folds of her dress. She felt a sudden fury, a deadly hate of her mistress, who took away from her one thing after the other.

She could have wept afterwards with unsatisfied longing. She must have some of it !

And then she helped the waiter, poor fellow, to collect all the scraps of the dessert from the plates for him to take his children ; he had told her how anxiously they looked out for his return and how they wept when their father brought them nothing.

Now, when she lay in her bed and could not sleep, she was angry at her good nature. In impotent rage she bit into the

corner of her pillow. If the young master had not brought her a glass of champagne she would not have had that either. But in this way—she giggled to herself in sudden good spirits—she had had a regular good lot, a whole, large tumbler full. She was so unused to wine, but it had not made her tired—on the contrary, she was surprised herself how well she could work after it; everything went so quickly and so easily.

Her blood tingled in her veins, she could feel its throbbing pulsations. There was a hammering in her temples, a singing in her ears. Oh, how oppressive it was! She tossed off the clothes and swung herself on to the edge of her bed; it did her good to put her burning feet on the cold boards.

On account of the party her little room next to Mrs. Selinger's bedroom was turned into a cloak-room, and so for this night she was sleeping in the pantry next to the dining-room, where china and glass were usually kept on the shelves.

So near to the dining-room! Through the little door in the wall she fancied she could smell the sweets. She sat there with bated breath. She craned her neck and stared into the darkness—on the other side of the dining-room a door led to Mr. Leo's room. He was asleep.

Nothing to be heard! But the sweet smell became stronger and stronger. Yes, it was the cake that she smelt!

She inflated her nostrils and drew a deep trembling breath. She could still see it in the centre of the table, a tower of sweetness, with its jagged points, crusted all over with sugar. Oh, if she could only break off a point, bite into it, crunch the sugar.

She brought her teeth together with a snap.

The cake rose before her more and more clearly. She could not stand it any longer. Suppose she were to light a candle and go in softly! In the next moment she had struck a match.

It was cold. She looked round timidly and hastily drew on a skirt. She was afraid, but her greed was greater than her fear—it carried her away. She did not even take special care that the door did not creak.

The candle guttered; she did not notice it. It flared up and threw a gigantic shadow on the wall.

There was the sideboard. No, it was no imagination, she

could smell the cake through the wood. Through every crack came a stream of sweetness. She must open the door—she must! Break off one point, only one single one!

Was the key left in the lock of the bookcase in the corner? It fitted the sideboard too.

She looked round wildly. Mrs. Selinger might have taken it out. But no, it was left in.

Thank Heaven, she held it in her hand! With trembling haste, she put it into the keyhole of the sideboard; it did not unlock it at once, she was in too great a hurry; she bit her lips—but now—ah, ah!

On her underlip was a drop of blood, she passed the tip of her tongue over it quickly. She was as if intoxicated.

A laugh came over her lips, a loud, imprudent laugh. She took both hands to the cake—there, she had broken off a point! She stuffed it into her mouth. Another!

At last, at last! She crunched the crusted sugar between her teeth, smacked her lips, devoured greedily.

There—the morsel stuck in her throat, she started and uttered an inarticulate sound—a hand was laid on her shoulder.

Horrified, she stared into Leo's black eyes.

“Now then?”

She could not get out a word.

“And so it's you. Only think of that!” He almost devoured her with his black eyes, his hand lay heavy on her soft shoulder.

“Let me go!” Her trembling lips could hardly form the words.

“No, thieves must be held fast!”

“I'm not a thief!”

“What are you then?” he said coldly. “You open the door with a false key—take locked-up things—in the middle of the night—isn't that what thieves do? I can't sleep—I hear a rustling—I creep to the door—I think: is a burglar there? I open the door softly and can't believe my eyes—no, no, you needn't speak, I know it! Your mouth is still full.”

“Do be quiet! Oh, please, please be quiet!” Bertha trembled from head to foot, she still held a piece of cake in a convulsive grip.

"You'll see what I shall do!" He held her tighter.

She pushed him away.

"Fie, for shame! I shall tell mamma!"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Of course I shall. How can you do such things? What business have you to be at the sideboard in the middle of the night?"

"I—I——" She could not speak; all the colour had left her face. "Oh, don't, Mr. Selinger," she said with a great effort, "please don't!"

He pretended to be very angry and could not help smiling at her fright.

"Mamma will be very surprised," he said more gently.

"Don't say anything," she groaned, let the piece of cake fall and raised her hands imploringly. "Please don't!"

"Well, we shall see. If you won't do it again——"

"No, no!"

"And promise me——" He said no more, but looked at her scantily clad figure; her beautiful, long, fair hair fell over her shoulders. His eyes gleamed.

For the first time she was conscious of her appearance. With a low cry she fled behind the dining-table.

He pursued her.

She tried to get into her room. He pushed in with her. She pushed him out again. There was a noiseless struggle on the threshold. Not a sound to be heard.

"Let me go," she whispered.

"Mamma shall know it early to-morrow!"

Terror took away her strength, and he took advantage of this to kiss her. But when, becoming bolder, he clasped her closely, she resisted like a wild thing.

"Leave me alone—I'll tell your mother!"

"You'd better not, I've much more to tell her!"

She broke into dry, furious sobbing, and gave him such a blow on the chest with her fist that he staggered back.

"Bertha, do be sensible, or——"

He pulled the door, which she was trying to shut behind her, out of her hand.

She pulled it to again.

The light which had been flickering on the sideboard went out suddenly and smelt horribly ; it had only been a candle-end.

Pitch darkness.

Without uttering a sound, setting her teeth together and exerting all her strength, she tried to shut the door.

He pressed against it. "Bertha," he whispered threateningly, "I'll tell !"

No answer. She strained desperately. Now the door fell into the lock. Now she pushed the bolt inside—she gave a short laugh. Let him knock !

But her knees trembled ; she staggered to the heap of soiled table-linen on the floor and sank down on it. She listened—what was he doing outside ?

She heard him creep away. It was a long time before she got back into bed and shuddering drew the clothes over her. Her breath came and went, her head burned, her heart beat violently—would he betray her ?

She must find out a way of making him silent without committing herself too much.

And she thought and thought ; morning came and yet she had not slept for a moment. Her head ached, she felt exhausted, bodily and mentally. She half triumphed, was half afraid, and the whole time thought of the piece of cake which had fallen from her hand.

She would be there before the others were up, pick it up from the carpet and eat it.

## XV

WINTER had come.

Bertha sat shivering in a corner of the kitchen and listened nervously to every sound from the rooms in front. Heaven be praised, Mr. Leo did not come down the long corridor ! He had no idea that they were both alone in the flat. Mrs. Selinger had

gone to a concert, and the cook was not to be dissuaded from taking advantage of the opportunity and going out too ; she would be back directly.

If she would only come ! Bertha listened anxiously ; the colour came and went on her face, which was thinner and delicate-looking. Her complexion was brilliant, the skin transparent ; her eyes had dark rings round them and seemed bigger, but they looked tired.

She was anæmic ; Mrs. Selinger was concerned about her pretty housemaid, and had begged the family doctor to prescribe some iron-drops for her, but these Bertha threw out of the window and ate up the sugar she was to take them with. How were iron-drops going to help her ?

If she had only been able to sleep better ! At night she lay in constant terror listening for a footstep, trembled at the slightest rustling of the paper on the wall, the creaking of the furniture, a drop of rain falling, the sound of wind against the window. Then she held her breath and gripped the bedclothes convulsively.

Or she started out of dreadful dreams—something threatening had bent over her, she felt its hot breath—with both feet she sprang out of bed and rushed to the door to assure herself that it was bolted.

How he tormented her ! Often, when she was waiting at table, especially when she handed the sweets, he looked at her with such a strange smile, that the dish shook in her hand. She was powerless against him. How gladly would she have given notice. The good situation had no more charms for her. But this she knew, he would not let her go without some punishment. And she feared for her future ; and so she remained in nervous apprehension.

She was never safe from him. Often, when she least expected him, he stood behind her and blew on her neck. If she was hurrying down the long, dark corridor, her arms full of crockery, he came in her way. If she turned out his room he was there too ; she felt his eyes upon her, always and everywhere, and this tortured her.

She hated Leo as the slave hates his tormentor ; but when she hated him so much that her eyes would have betrayed her she

lowered her golden eyelashes and listened to his remarks with seeming bashfulness. Her heart beat violently, she gnashed her teeth, but she twisted her mouth into a smile. She must smile. But for how long would this smile suffice? . . .

Shuddering, the lonely girl in the kitchen started up. Listen; was not that a footstep? She looked round wildly. Was he coming? No, the footstep was on the back-stairs. Thank Heaven, it was Marie!

No, she had a key! There was a hesitating knock; feet were wiped on the straw mat outside.

“Who’s there?”

“Is Bertha at home?” asked a timid voice from behind the door. “I’m from her village. Can I speak to her?”

“You, Mina?” Bertha opened the door quickly and pulled in the bashful visitor. “You’ve come to see me at last. I am glad!”

Mina had never been to the Selingers’ before; she had only seen Bertha in the Reschkes’ cellar, and that was seldom now.

Bertha gave Mina a chair. “I’m quite alone; she’s gone to a concert, only Leo’s here.”

Quite happy at this unexpectedly friendly reception, Mina sat down.

“D’ye know”—Bertha smiled at her—“I thought yer didn’t want to see me any more!”

“I?” Mina started, surprised. “I not want to see ye? You can’t mean that, Bertha! I’ve always liked ye! But you—you don’t care about me!”

“Now go and roast me a stork!” Bertha had learnt to speak like the Berliners. “Mina, how can ye be so foolish? No, really I likes ye very much!” And she stroked her cheek caressingly.

Mina embraced her warmly. “I’m glad, I’m right glad, Bertha! You’re very good! Oh, if we’d never gone away from home!”

That sounded sad, like a complaint. “Ain’t you comfortable where you are? If ye don’t like the captain’s why don’t you leave?” said Bertha.

“No, no, it’s all very comfortable, only”—she sighed and passed her hand over her forehead—“well, every one’s got



their cross. D'ye know, Bertha, why I've come?" She looked at her friend from the side with rather an embarrassed smile. "Guess!"

"Wanted to see me?" Bertha whirled her pretty figure round on one foot with a coquettish laugh. "Say, Mina, let's go out together next Sunday—to Halensee, for a dance—shall we? I'll introduce ye to my friends."

Mina shook her head. "No, no, that's nought for me. D'ye know, Bertha"—she made a pause, it was evidently difficult for her to bring out her request—"I'd like the money back I lent ye. Yer mus'n't be offended wi' me."

"The money? What money?"

"You know: two shillings at first—it's more'n a year ago—and then afterwards five and sixpence—yer wanted to pay off something at the Grummachs', an' then two shillings at Whitsuntide—you went to the early concert—an' then sixpence for chocolate. Makes ten shillings," she concluded, as if the large sum was in some way an excuse for her asking for it back.

Bertha got red. "Ah, yes!" She had not thought any more about it. How disagreeable that she had no money just now! She would like to have given it to Mina at once. "D'ye want it very badly?" she inquired. "What for?"

"I want it," was the short answer.

"Can't you wait? As soon as I get my wages, ye shall have it; ye may be sure o' that. Goodness knows how it is—one, two, three—the wages is gone, flown away!"

"Ten shillings!"

Bertha gave her clear laugh. "Yes, yes, ten shillings; what's that? It ain't all the world, tho' ye do seem to think so. Why, it's nothing. "I soon spend that!"

"I don't!" A look of pain passed over Mina's face and even struck Bertha.

"What's the matter?"

Mina made no answer; she had folded her work-worn hands on her lap and stared fixedly on the floor.

"Are ye in debt? Snap yer fingers at it!"

"No, no. Leave me alone, Bertha. I must go now, I have to put clothes in soak, several tubs full. Good-bye, Bertha!" She

gave her hand to her friend. "An' as soon as ye have the money, I'll get it, shan't I? Yer won't forget?"

Bertha saw how hard it was for Mina to go without the money. On the stairs she turned round once more and called back, "Yer won't forget, will ye?"

Bertha listened, as she went heavily down the stairs—tramp, tramp. Then she went back thoughtfully into the kitchen—why was she so cast down? Mina was very altered, she had lines on her forehead and—didn't she look worn!

She lifted the lamp and with a complacent smile surveyed herself in the little glass which hung at the window hidden behind the curtain. Her smile became more and more pleased—yes, she was handsome! They were all right who told her so: the baker, the butcher, the grocer, the gentlemen who came to the house, the porter, the ironing-woman, the charwoman, Mother Reschke, the beggars, all, all!

She could not tear herself away from her own smiling picture, the arm which held up the lamp was beginning to tremble—there—knocking again! And once more quick, impatient, hasty knocking.

"Patience, patience! I'm coming." She opened the door. "Miss Gertrude, you——?" Bertha stared at her open-eyed in the utmost astonishment.

"Hush!" said Gertrude Reschke in a strangely quiet and yet hard voice. "Is Mr. Selinger at home?"

"Yes, but——"

"Nobody else there?"

Bertha shook her head, she was speechless—what was going to happen?

"Well then!"—Gertrude came nearer and looked at her with eyes that sparkled and shone as if with fever—"I must speak with Mr. Selinger. Quick!" She pushed Bertha aside and looked as if she were going to hurry through the kitchen into the long corridor.

"No, no, Miss Reschke, stop! What are you thinkin' of? I must take in yer name!"

"No!" Gertrude flung off Bertha's hand. "I've stood down in the street long enough and waited. I know his window, a

light's burning there. And Mina just came down and said you were alone with him. And so I ran up. Let me go in to him—quick!”

The hand which Bertha had caught was icy cold. Half-melted snowflakes covered her hat, her jacket; her boa hung round her neck like a wet string. Her dress dragged, and was muddy round the bottom. Her hair was out of curl and hung in dank locks over her pale face. Behind the wet veil a drop of water could be seen hanging to every lock and trickling down like a slow-falling tear. A cold breath came from her; she was shivering, her mouth twitched with suppressed excitement.

“Bertha,” she whispered hoarsely, “is he engaged? He's not thinking of it, is he?”

“Not he!”

“I thought so, it's all humbug!” A short bitter laugh shook her slight frame. “Ah, you shall hear of it!”

She ran down the long corridor. Bertha followed her. “Do wait, Miss Gertrude. Let me tell him; he'll give it me if I don't!”

She was heartily glad that Mr. Leo should have this visit, which looked as if it would end in a row. The thought pleased her, but she would take care to incur no blame. She seized Gertrude's dress, they both reached the room together.

“Come in!”

Now Gertrude started back; Bertha put her head round the door. “Mr. Selinger, somebody wants to see you!”

The young man half rose from the sofa, keeping his legs on it. “Say I'm not at home, and then come back; I've something for you to do.”

Bertha made a grimace, she knew what this meant. She could hardly conceal her mischievous delight under a submissive manner. “It's a young girl, Mr. Selinger; she won't go away——”

“Confound it!” Leo's legs were off the sofa in a moment. There stood Gertrude Reschke.

“Good-evenin',” she said with seeming calmness.

And then for a moment dead silence.

Those were looks that passed between the two—he so red and she pale.

Bertha retired noiselessly, she preferred to listen outside. She

had not quite closed the door, but Gertrude's hand shut it firmly.

Now Bertha stood there, her head forward, holding her breath, and listened, listened.

Inside a murmur—that was Gertrude—and then his voice in affected astonishment: “I—letters? I haven't received any letters!”

Now she screamed, “You *have* received my letters! How often I've written to you. How often I've waited for you, hours—days—weeks! Every evening, always, always. You lie, you've lied to me altogether. What did ye pretend to me: You must be engaged, your mamma would have it, you were so sad—as if that were a reason. Couldn't ye still keep true to me? But you've got your eye on some one else, you have! And you wanted to get rid of me—you were tired of me—oh—you were!” She wept. Bertha heard her convulsive sobbing.

And now a long monotonous murmur, low, soothing talking.

He was clever! He did not get angry, but tried what good words would do.

Now her sobbing voice was heard again. “What—what have I done to you? Oh, Leo, Leo!”

Goodness, what a fuss she made about the fellow! Bertha curled her lips disdainfully. She was really sorry for the girl, but she was too stupid!

No more loud talking came from inside now, but a low, low weeping. Bertha got quite tired from standing; there was no end to it! Would they make it up after all?”

But now—she started nervously—a scream, like an animal in mortal distress, half fury, half pain. . . . “Keep your money!”

Something fell to the floor with a rattle. The door was torn open—Bertha had scarcely time to spring aside—Gertrude rushed out, blinded with tears, ran down the corridor as if pursued and out at the door.

## XVI

MAGGIE RESCHKE had the kitchen to herself now. Gertrude had resolutely refused to sleep with her any longer.

For in the night quiet Maggie was singularly lively. When she thought her sister was asleep, she crept out of the bed on the kitchen table, stole into a corner by the fire-place and knelt down there. Gertrude was half awake, but the monotonous murmur soon sent her to sleep again—now there was a cry, a scream: “Hallelujah!” Gertrude started up. That was no longer a murmur, it was an ever louder supplication, a wild lisping, a wrestling in prayer, a lamentation, a frantic stammering. Moans and groans were heard in the stillness of the night; the damp cellar walls sent back an unearthly echo.

“Save—save my soul——!”

Gertrude did not dare call her sister; it was like a horrible nightmare; she had a weight on her chest, a suffocating feeling at her throat.

“Save—save my soul——!”

Oh, how that sounded! Gertrude burst into frightened tears and drew the bedclothes over her head. She put her fingers into her ears, but she still heard it. Shuddering, with drops of perspiration on her forehead, she listened as if under a spell until the stammering ceased, and the last Hallelujah had died away.

Maggie, icy cold, crept back into bed, but yet a fire seemed to come from her emaciated body. Sleep was not to be thought of. For Maggie, tormented with unrest, threw herself from one side to the other.

“Lie still,” whispered Gertrude.

Then the child seized her sister’s hands. She pressed close to her side, put her lips to her ear, and breathed, while hot tears wetted Gertrude’s neck: “Save—save your soul!”

“Leave me alone!” Gertrude pushed her roughly away, turned her back on her and lay close up against the wall. It was not to be stood. She complained bitterly.

It was a good thing that Arthur was no longer living at home

and so Gertrude could have his room. Crazy Maggie might make as much noise now as she liked! They all laughed at her.

Arthur's monthly salary was now raised to fifty shillings, he did not see why he should hand over half of it to his mother. With it he could live comfortably as his own master. He made the distance from the Göbenstrasse to the Jägerstrasse the excuse; he felt the cold dreadfully in the morning in his thin coat.

When one has been so long in a cellar, living high up has great attractions. Arthur took a room in the Kleine Mauerestrasse, on the fifth floor; just opposite was the door to the garrets.

A beautiful room with an interesting view on to the roofs below. Only it was cold, very cold; its present inmate, accustomed to the warm, steamy air of the cellar, could not lose his cough. Up here the wind whistled through all the cracks, a current of air streamed into the middle of the room through the badly-fitting window.

Heating was a luxury, and as nobody would know anything about it Arthur thought it useless. As it was he was out the whole day; when he came home in the evening he got into bed in his clothes and boots. If he could not fall asleep at once, or was too cold even then, he ran down into the lighted streets again, and warmed himself in the hot tide of life which surged round him in the Friedrichstrasse; in some restaurant with waitresses he thawed completely.

In this way his money went.

Every other Sunday Mina came to see him; it was the only day he did not patrol the streets. She was touchingly punctual, red and heated she was there at half-past five to the minute. She kept to it; the only time she was rebellious was when Mrs. von Saldern, who had toothache, wished to keep her at home for once on her Sunday out.

Then Arthur lay on the bed and smoked, and Mina sat at the window in the waning daylight and darned his socks and mended his linen. She could only work slowly, one stitch after the other; her fingers were red and swollen from chilblains and could hardly hold the needle. Their breath ascended like a cloud of smoke; they did not talk much, the words were frozen. But on Mina's face was a continuous serious smile.

In the evening she made coffee at the landlady's close by, and

unpacked the liver sausage and roll she had brought with her; there was a piece of cake for Arthur too. The coffee loosened their tongues, they warmed each other embracing.

Mina wanted all the money she could get.

To-day she hoped for some tips. The von Salderns gave their yearly party in honour of the captain's birthday. Some lieutenants, friends of his, were invited, the major with wife and daughter, and also the colonel.

Poor little Mrs. von Saldern had had no rest for days before. Everything was to be nice and not cost too much, so she took the tram to the Central Market Hall in Alexander Square to buy the joint; meat was not so dear there. She rushed from one street to another, from one shop to another, and was delighted if she got anything a halfpenny cheaper.

When the great day came she was quite worn out. At seven o'clock in the morning she was in the kitchen, preparing the fish mayonnaise; she had an innocent little trick for this; some flour and water boiled to a paste and mixed with the mayonnaise made it much more, and no one noticed anything.

The farther the day advanced the greater became Mrs. von Saldern's restlessness; a hundred times she ran from the sitting-room into the kitchen, from the kitchen into the sitting-room. Mina received so many instructions that she got quite confused towards evening. Besides, she had an exhausting feeling of languor, her limbs felt heavy as lead. When she put on her Sunday dress—she had to help the soldier-servant wait at table as well as to cook—she was seized with giddiness; groaning she sank down on the edge of her bed.

But there was a cry: "Mina, Mina, where are you? Do put the children to bed! It's time the joint was in the oven! You haven't peeled the potatoes either! Mina, Mina, do hurry yourself a little. I must lie down for a few minutes, I feel ready to drop."

Mina stumbled hastily into the kitchen; her head was swimming, but she had no time to think of her own indisposition.

But it was not to be quite forgotten. When she handed the dish of mayonnaise to the colonel, she did it from the wrong side—she really did not know which was right and which was left,

everything turned round all at once. Admonished, she stumbled, held the dish crookedly—there was a spot of sauce on the colonel's trousers. She was so frightened she nearly dropped the whole dish.

"Have your wits about you ; show a pleasant face," her mistress had instilled into her ; now she forced her contorted mouth to a friendly grin. When she came round a second time she pressed the guests to take some more : "Do take a little piece, they're so small !" "It's good perch, not haddock ! Do take some more !"

The housewife looked at her anxiously, the captain cleared his throat and said reprovingly, "Mina !" She heard nothing, she noticed nothing, everything was swimming before her ; she dared not look at the mayonnaise, only straight in front of her, or she felt sick.

The guests scarcely suppressed a smile, when the colonel, a jovial bachelor, honoured Mina with a remark, and then the major, the lieutenants followed suit. They laughed unrestrainedly.

At first Mina answered briskly, but when she felt that they were laughing at her she ran out of the room, dropped on to the bench in the kitchen, and buried her glowing face in her hands.

She did not want to go in again, but she was obliged to ; now she did not venture to raise her eyes, walked gingerly, and set her face stonily.

Thank Heaven, that supper was over ! At least she could remain outside in the kitchen, while in the drawing-room the major's wife sang of "Deathless Love," and a lieutenant played her accompaniment.

The colonel left at midnight, quarter of an hour later the major and his ladies followed. Mina lighted them down the stairs ; now she had two sixpenny bits, but she was not happy. She could not be happy about anything at all to-day, she was ashamed, sad and tired to death. Oh, only to rest for a moment before going up the four flights again ! She left the key in the door and sat down heavily on the lowest step.

When the lieutenants came down an hour later they found the girl curled up on the bottom stair, her head resting against the cold wall and fast asleep. A little lamp flickered by her and lighted up a mouth drawn with pain and a frowning forehead.



“Hush, she is asleep,” the foremost whispered. They all stood round her a moment and looked at her. Then they put their obolus into the open hand which lay listlessly on her lap—the sixpenny bit of the major still gleamed in it—and departed highly amused.

Next morning Mina was given notice. She was thunderstruck, but Mrs. von Saldern wept too: such a girl, to disgrace them so! What had it not cost them, so much money, so much trouble, and what was the result? They had damaged their position, made themselves socially almost impossible! Anxious, bitter tears ran down her pale cheeks; the captain too was in low spirits.

Mina, in her anguish, ran to the Reschkes' cellar; she left it again with a rather brighter face. Mrs. Reschke could always find a way out of a difficulty. Not only did she know of a place—a few houses farther up, a young couple, where the handsome Augusta had been, were looking out for a girl—but she abused the “poverty-stricken captain on the fourth floor” with such gusto that Mina's heart became lighter.

She left her affairs with full confidence in Mrs. Reschke's hands, and, when the day came for her to leave, moved to the Beaks'. Mr. Beak was accountant in a bank. They were lively young people, everything was new, a spotless kitchen with innumerable blue-white saucepans, blue ribbons, blue and white crochet edging on the shelves. And on the second floor!

Mina felt that for once she had luck. The first evening when she stood in the pretty kitchen, rinsing the dishes and plates from the plentiful supper—there was no stint here, that she had noticed already—the young wife came out to her. She was in *negligé*, a pretty pale-blue dressing-gown, trimmed with a good deal of lace, which suited her round child-face charmingly.

“Mina,” she said, “we shall call you ‘Anna’; my name is Elsie, but my husband says ‘Minnie’ to me, and that is too like yours! And so you shall be ‘Anna.’” She laughed gaily, and looked kindly at Mina with her pretty eyes. “I think we shall get on very well together, you haven't too much to do here either. I go out every day at the same time and fetch my husband; when we come in of course dinner must be ready. Then I sleep a little, and during that time you can wash up

undisturbed; in the evening I fetch my husband again. On Sunday we always go to my parents, then you haven't to cook at all, and mamma helps me a good deal, and——" She stopped; her husband's voice was heard calling, "Minnie, Minnie!"

He came into the kitchen. "Minnie," he said reproachfully, "you're standing again! You know you are not to stand long!" Full of concern he put his arm round her waist. "Come in and lie down on the sofa!"

"Yes, yes!" She nestled up to him. "And you'll sit by me and read to me." She nodded smilingly to the girl. "So it's Anna!"

"Why Anna?" he asked. "I thought her name was Mina!"

The young wife laughed. "But, dear, that won't do! When you call 'Minnie'—and you do that very often—and she understands 'Mina'—haha-haha!" She laughed gaily. "That would be a nice confusion! Haha-ha!"

He thought that very comical too, and laughed heartily with her. Their arms round each other's waists, they went back into the sitting-room; their merry, tender laughter was long heard in the kitchen.

Why was Mina so sad? She was sure to be comfortable here. She left off rinsing her dishes, let her wet hands drop on her blue apron, and stared before her. The tears coursed one another down her cheeks—she was not even to keep her name!

Next morning—the young wife was not yet up—the young husband came into the kitchen.

"Anna," he said, "I must go now. Mrs. Reschke has told me that you are a reliable girl. Now look after my wife for me, you shan't lose by it! When she gets up she has her tea, and as she does not care to eat anything so early, she must have two lightly-boiled eggs at eleven, and at twelve, before she fetches me, some biscuits and a glass of the Hungarian wine which you will find on the sideboard. If you happen to have good soup, you can bring her a cup of it in between. And for goodness' sake don't let her climb on a chair or lift anything—you'd better feed the bird, it hangs so high! You are a sensible person, so take care!"

Then he went, not without first stealing to the bedroom door and listening to hear if she was still asleep.

Mina had a good time with these good people. Nobody said a cross word to her, Mr. Beak patted her on the shoulder and his young wife thanked her for everything with her tender smile. Mrs. Beak's mother, a stately, comfortable looking lady who came every day to look after her daughter in the absence of the husband, gave the girl a blouse, aprons, and now and again a shilling. Mina wanted nothing, and yet she did not write home to say how well off she was—she did not write at all. And yet she often leant against the fire-place and stirred absent-mindedly in her saucepans—round, round and round—without noticing that they boiled over and the foam hissed and spluttered on the hearth.

She was preoccupied, often in the middle of speaking she forgot what she wanted to say; then she stood and looked at her young mistress with dim, lustreless eyes, like a poor animal that wants to complain and yet cannot speak.

March came and Easter. There were warm breezes, the earth awoke to life; the parsley roots, which Mina had planted in a box before the kitchen window, put out green sprouts. A bright sun peeped into all the corners and showed every speck of dust.

Young Mrs. Beak was not to be stopped from having a thorough spring-cleaning of the whole flat. Not a thing was allowed to remain in its place, the furniture was moved, the walls rubbed down, the beds beaten, the parquet floor in the drawing-room and dining-room scoured and then rubbed with some new preparation of wax.

It was in the drawing-room. The curtains were taken down, the windows stood wide open, the delicate blue sky of early spring looked in. Laughing voices of children sounded from the street, on the window-sill sparrows hopped, twittered, chased one another. Bright, clear weather, inquisitive little sunbeams darting about everywhere.

Mina was polishing the floor, pushing the heavy brush backwards and forwards. Her chest heaved, her breath came and went. She stopped constantly, gasped, and wiped away the perspiration which stood in beads on her forehead.

Mrs. Beak stood on a footstool and polished the glass of the

clock on the mantelpiece herself ; she disobeyed her husband's command in doing so, but she would not allow any one else to touch it. It was her favourite wedding present ; above the works stood in gold letters, "The hour strikes for a happy pair !"

Suddenly she staggered down from the footstool, sank on the nearest chair with a sigh and closed her eyes.

Mina had half closed her eyes too ; she was very pale, her lips were tightly compressed to keep back a groan. But her hands did not relax their hold of the brush ; regularly, as if driven by a machine, the iron weight glided backwards and forwards.

"Wine—Anna—don't you hear?" sighed the young wife. "Anna—wine!"

With a crash the brush fell to the ground. Mina rushed into the dining-room to the sideboard ; the boards creaked under her heavy, clumsy tread. The cork was low down in the bottle ; she had no more strength at all in her arms, however much she tried. She had to use her teeth to do it.

Pale as death herself she held the glass to her mistress's lips. She drank the wine ; after the first sip her young face was rosy again. "Oh, thank you ; now I am all right. Don't tell mamma or my husband that I have polished the clock, they would be beside themselves. It won't hurt me. Go on with your work now. Hurry a little, so that everything is ready when he comes home."

Mina stooped and grasped the handle of the brush ; she began again, then suddenly she let it fall, reeled, and put both hands to her waist as if she felt an intolerable pain there.

"I can't!" Her blanched lips trembled with suppressed weeping.

The young wife raised her head. For a few moments the two women stared mutely at each other. Through the unshaded window the sunlight poured in with merciless brightness—there was nothing more to be concealed now.

"What is the matter with you?" stammered the young wife.

No answer. With a moan which she tried to conceal under a cough, Mina cowered on the ground and groped about blindly. She could not get up, she lay there her whole length, like an animal crushed to the earth.

“Are you ill?”

No answer.

“Do answer!”

Not a word, only a wail.

“But—Anna——!” The gentle child-face of the young wife was suddenly turned to stone. Drawing her blue dressing-gown round her so as not to touch the dirt she left the room.

## XVII

“You must meet luck 'alfway” was a favourite saying of Mother Reschke's; so she sent her daughter Gertrude across to Handke's shop as often as possible. Ella was no longer allowed to fetch anything, it was always Gertrude. She even sent for things they kept in the cellar themselves. “A pound of salt! Half a pint of petroleum! Quarter of a pound of coffee!” and so on.

It was a great day on which Gertrude could report for the first time, “Mother, he let 'em all stand and wait, seven of them, and served me first!”

Mrs. Reschke's careworn face brightened; a happy prospect at last! And she really needed cheering, now that her poor Arthur was so upset. He had been home yesterday and his complaints would have melted a stone. What drudgery it was! To sit as crooked as a fiddlestick from early morning till late in the evening, the pen never out of his hand, and then he had never written quickly enough; only one hour for dinner and then back again into the dark office where you ruined your eyes. And all that for fifty shillings! It was a shame! No, he would not stand it much longer, Arthur had said.

How wretchedly ill he looked! As thin as a lath, his clothes hung about him, the faint line of his dark moustache intensified the paleness of his bloodless lips.

His mother had put her hand into the till for him; unhappily there was not much there: the vegetable shop in the Kirchbach-

strasse took much of their custom, and since a new one had opened in the Göbenstrasse, six houses off, there was really nothing doing. It was too bad that the tag-rag and bob-tail should be allowed to set up shop! And what presents they made the servants! Indeed, respectable tradespeople had no chance.

If only Gertrude could catch the assistant over the way, they would be all right!

And so Gertrude, when she came home for dinner, when she came home in the evening—tired and jaded—when she stood yawning in the morning and waved her hair, heard nothing but “The charmin’ fellow.” “An’ so rich ’e is!” “A bizness of ’is own—that ’ud be a stroke of luck!”

“Let me alone,” she grumbled at first, and then added listlessly, “I don’t care,” and then at last pricked up her ears.

The last Sunday in March the Reschkes invited “him” for the first time.

As the weather was pleasant there was to be a short walk first. Punctually at five o’clock Mr. Ladewig from Kottbus was at the door.

And he was not kept waiting; first came Ella, then Mrs. Reschke in black silk—it had been her wedding dress—Mr. Reschke in a top-hat, and Gertrude in a tight-fitting bright red dress. She wore no jacket, and the little bunch of violets which Mr. Ladewig presented with a bow she fastened to her bodice in front.

All the men turned round to look at her; her red dress could be seen from a distance through the young green of the bushes in the Tiergarten. The assistant, who was sauntering by her side, ten paces before her parents, felt very flattered. If only somebody from Kottbus could see him now! She was an awfully smart girl! He told her so too, and she looked at him from under her eyelids, her head a little on one side. “Come now, you’ve said that to a good many before!”

“On my honour, miss, I haven’t,” he assured her, and ventured to press her hand as a proof of his sincerity. She allowed him to hold her dainty finger-tips a few minutes, a stream of tingling, throbbing life passed into his fat red fingers which were always swollen from chilblains,

Mrs. Reschke, who rustled along behind on her husband's arm, and observed everything attentively, was highly satisfied. "Did yer see," she whispered, "how 'e looked at 'er? You give 'im enough to drink this evenin', an' then 'e'll come to the scratch—will yer bet?"

"Then I'll buy a cavalry 'orse," murmured Reschke, "to drive to market. An' Sundays into the Park."

"You're crazy! We'll retire, I tell yer; as it is, there's little to be made in the shop now."

That he understood. "You're right, my dear!" He pushed his hat on to his forehead and scratched his head. "Book-keepin' ain't of no use at all."

"P'r'aps we can let Arthur study then," she said thoughtfully.

"Now yer altogether off yer 'ead," he screamed rather loudly and roughly. "It's Arthur 'ere an' Arthur there! Wot's the fellow to me? 'E don't stop anywhere, 'e's that lazy, 'e——"

"Sh, sh!" She pressed his arm.

And Ella, who was strutting along on her mother's hand, said in her shrill child's voice, "But, papa, he'll hear you!"

"Yes, Ella dear is quite right!" Mrs. Reschke trembled with rage. "You've no feelin' for yer children. When 'e"—she looked at the suitor before them—"hears you make sich a row, 'e'll pop off at once. Be quiet, can't you?" She pinched his arm and then called out in her sweetest voice, "Don't gallop so, Gertie, my child! Mr. Ladewig can't keep up wi' yer!"

Gertrude had indeed suddenly quickened her pace. At a distance, in the "Siegesallée," where a crowd of sight-seers thronged round the lately-erected statues, she thought she saw in a cab, by the side of an elderly lady, a handsome young man—Leo! Without looking where she was going she plunged into a narrow side path.

"Come," said Mrs. Reschke, and held back her husband, who was going to follow the young couple, by the sleeve of his coat. "Leave 'em alone!"

The parents and Ella went straight home. Mrs. Reschke was glad to be able to finish her preparations undisturbed. The table was, indeed, laid; in the middle a bunch of flowers from the florist's, but outside the turkey was hissing in the oven. Maggie,

who was to have basted it continually, lay on the kitchen-table bed and slept; a sounding box on the ears scarcely awoke her.

The pale girl stammered that she was not well, her limbs were so tired, her head so heavy.

"Don't tell me! Bustle up, make yerself useful. An' you're not to lie about 'ere when the visitor comes, d'you hear? Quick, fetch some sugar to put over the turkey, it'll brown better; an' father's to put the wine on the table, a bottle for each place! 'Ere, you can carry in the apple-sauce. Take care I don't catch yer at the tart or the whipped cream! Now then, wot are yer waitin' for?"

"I'm—hungry," the child said with difficulty.

"You won't get anything yet. I'll put some bread an' drippin' on the counter afterwards. You can stop in the shop, nobody'll come in there. I won't 'ave yer here. There—there's a knock at the back door! Be off with you!"

Maggie flitted away like a shadow.

But it was not the young couple—only Arthur. Pale and discontented he came into the kitchen, established himself by the fire-place with his hands in his trousers-pockets, and watched his mother put more butter on the turkey.

"You don't deny yourselves anything," he said sourly.

"Why should we? To-day?" She did not look up, the flickering light of the fire was reflected in greasy rays on her reddened full-moon face.

"What's up?"

"Gertie's goin' to be engaged!"

"Is she?" he grumbled without interest, and bit his nails.

"A charmin' fellow. Quite out of the ord'nary!"

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose he's got money."

"S'pose! I like that! Money! Why, she marries a fortun', she does!"

He laughed bitterly. "Well, if Gertrude's going to marry a fortune, see that my rich brother-in-law does something for me. I left my place at the lawyer's yesterday."

"Wot——?" The basting-ladle fell out of his mother's hand. "Gracious, Arthur, how you frightened me! Oh, wot'll father say!"



"It's all the same to me," he said with a look of defiance on his pale face, and staring into the oven. "He hasn't got anything to say, nor you either! It's all your fault!"

"Our—fault? Wot yer talking about, Arthur? Didn't we send you to the 'Igh School?"

"That you did, haha!" He gave the coal-scuttle such a kick that it flew into the middle of the kitchen. "And now I'm to be ordered about by a clerk who's been to a Board School! That won't do for me."

"There I'm with yer!" Mother Reschke got up and stood with her arms akimbo. "An' 'e 'ad the cheek, that 'asn't been to a 'Igh School, an' don't know how eddicated people be'ave! You're quite right. I agree with yer—put up with 'is nonsense? That 'ud be a nice thing! No, that ain't necessary; you'll git something else."

"It 'll be demd hard," he said gloomily.

In this moment they heard Father Reschke's rumbling bass and Gertrude's high laugh.

"There they are! Quiet, Arthur, quiet," whispered his mother hastily. "Go in, an' show a pleasant face! It'll all come right. To-day we're jolly!" She pushed him out of the kitchen.

Gertrude had come back from her walk in wild spirits, she often laughed loudly, without any cause, and threw herself forward.

Mr. Ladewig kept a constant grin on his face, shook Arthur's hand warmly, pulled at his piqué waistcoat, and made sheep's eyes at Gertrude, but he did not say much. Father Reschke bowed him to the place of honour on the sofa, where he sat with Ella on his knee playing with his watch-chain.

"Is it gold?" asked the child pertly. "Will you buy your wife a gold one?"

They all laughed.

"Yes, our Ella," said Reschke proudly, "she's sharp."

Then Mrs. Reschke brought in the turkey, helped everybody, and gave the guest the largest piece. She urged them to fall to. "Eat away, children! Father, pour out the wine! Mr. Ladewig, you'll be accustomed ter better Moselle, but this 'ere comes from the 'eart! Gertrude, sit on the sofa with Mr. Ladewig; 'e do sit there so forlorn like the dot on a i."

"He mustn't get the dumps," said Gertrude, and moved towards the young man.

Father Reschke filled the glasses, tongues were loosened, the conversation became animated.

Ella ran round the table gnawing at a drumstick which her father had given her, twitched her sister, twitched the young man, drank out of everybody's glass, and shrieked with laughter.

Mr. Ladewig spoke of Kottbus specialities which his father sold: goose-breasts of prime quality, iced cakes and other delicacies.

Mrs. Reschke gazed at him enraptured, the gravy dripping from her mouth on to the napkin which she had pinned across her ample bosom.

They were all thoroughly enjoying themselves when there was a knock at the back-door. It was stupid Ella's fault, who went to see who was there, that Mina stumbled in; she did not venture nearer, but stammered out an excuse for her coming. When she raised her lowered eyelids and saw Arthur a gleam of joy passed over her troubled face.

Mrs. Reschke did not offer Mina anything, did not even press her to sit down—a nice thing, her coming in like this! And what *did* she look like! She was so remarkably cool to her niece all at once that she faltered out she would not disturb them, she would go. Nobody stopped her.

But Arthur caught a last despairing look, so imploring, so full of meaning that, against his will, he felt compelled to rise. Murmuring something about letting Mina out through the shop, he went before her to the glass door.

Nobody heeded the two, they were all occupied with themselves. Father Reschke drank to his guest again and again; he had got to the emotional stage and stuttered in a voice choked with tears: "Your 'ealth—dear Ladewig—my dear Ladewig, 'onoured Mr. Ladewig—pleased to see yer—you're with 'omely—your 'ealth—'omely people, but in the bosom—your 'ealth—of an 'appy family!"

Mr. Ladewig, stimulated by plentiful food and drink, whispered into Gertrude's ear, and devoured her with his watery eyes. Gertrude herself looked down on her lap and giggled incessantly,

but she allowed Mr. Ladewig to put his red, clumsy, chilblain fingers round her dainty waist.

Mrs. Reschke gazed at the couple on the sofa with motherly eyes, and Ella took advantage of the general preoccupation to gobble down the remains of the cucumber salad, and what was left of the whipped cream.

In the dark shop Arthur felt himself seized by Mina's cold, trembling hands.

"I went to see ye—I wanted to speak to ye—you wer'n't there—I've looked for ye—I must speak to ye. Arthur! I'm frightened! They've giv' me notice—an' I'll have to leave soon—where shall I go? What can I do? I can't take a place. Nobody'll have me—I'm of no use now—every one can see it! Arthur, Arthur!" She clung to him.

He stood as if stunned, overcome by a paralyzing fear.

"Tell me, Arthur, help me; what'll I do?"

"How do I know—how do I know?" he stammered.

"Good God, Arthur, do think! What'll we do? If I go on as if it wer'n't there, it's there still. An' it comes, it'll soon come! Arthur!" She shook him in her despair.

"For Heaven's sake, not so loud!" Trembling he put his cold hand on her mouth. "Can't you go to your parents? Do go to your parents!"

"No, no, I'll not show myself at home like this! Never!" She broke off, a burning blush of shame overspread her face. "I'll not go home like this."

"Well, what'll you do—what'll you do?" he said mechanically, as if talking in his sleep.

She screamed loudly, "You'll not desert me, Arthur, will ye?"

If they had not been making such a noise in the room they must have heard the voice, this solitary voice, which rang like a powerful chorus, revealing the whole misery of humanity.

But the scream was drowned in the laughter and merry babel of talk.

Arthur stood there trembling. Despair seized him, he looked round wildly. Everything black—black—an eternal gloom. Not one ray of light!

With clenched fists he struck out into the impenetrable darkness.  
 "Damn the cellar!"

She clung to him. "Don't swear, Arthur, it's no use. Rather think what we'll do!"

"There's nothing to think about, there's nothing to be done! You'll have to know it. I've lost my place, left it yesterday."

Staggering back she uttered an inarticulate sound—this news was like a blow in her face. She had hoped, she did not know what, from this place, but still it was a hope. "Lost—yer place—you're not there any more—how's that?"

"I'm not going to be put on," he grumbled, hiding his anxiety under stubbornness.

"Oh, Arthur!" She burst into tears. No loud sobbing, it was too deep down.

"Don't make such a noise," he said roughly, and pressed her hand so hard that his nails ran into her flesh.

"I don't make a noise." Her voice was faint and exhausted. Then pain overcame him; weeping, he put his arms round her and sobbed on her neck.

Hushed moments in deep darkness.

They clung to one another like two criminals, trembling at sight of the scaffold.

A call startled them.

"Arthur, Arthur, where are you?"

"Mother!" Wild with fear, the young fellow tore himself away, left Mina standing in the shop and ran back into the sitting-room. She was alone in the darkness—quite alone! But no, not alone. A trembling sigh out of the gloom echoed her sigh. She almost screamed with fright, a damp hand touched hers. Somebody had crept up and now nestled close to her. A voice breathed in her ear, "Don't be sad, Mina!"

"Maggie!" She could not say more, her tears flowed incessantly. And the harsh voice breathed—

"Tell it Jesus!  
 Thou hast never  
 Such Friend and Brother.  
 Tell it Jesus!"

“Let me be!” In exasperation, Mina tore herself away and rushed up out of the cellar, slamming the door behind her.

## XVIII

MINA did not venture into the street on Monday, she was glad that there was nothing to be fetched. She thought all eyes would be turned upon her. The stones upon which she trod would prick like needles, and the sparrows on the roofs would chirp continually, “Where will you go?”

The girl, formerly so careful, had not thought of packing her things; everything still hung about in the pretty servant’s room into which the spring sun shone so pleasantly. A bright ray gilded the walls and shone on her face as she cowered on the edge of the bed and stared vacantly before her.

It was very quiet in the flat, the young wife had been fetched by her mother to spend the day with her; Mr. Beak, too, was dining with his parents-in-law. In all her dull apathy Mina still felt it: they would not have anything more to do with her, they behaved as if she had already gone. Accustomed to be on the look-out, she listened involuntarily every moment for the clear call of the young wife—oh, it was only the canary in the sitting-room, calling for its food! She got up to give it some rape-seed.

And then she began to clean her kitchen, as if it had not been done for months; every utensil was scoured, every kettle polished. The walls were soaped. At least they should not say that she had left anything dirty for the new girl. Over the work she forgot herself a little, and rubbed the stove-doors till she could see her reflection on their bright surface; then all at once it came over her again with crushing force—where to go?

The day after to-morrow she must go—where?

She could not stand it, mortal terror oppressed her. The quiet flat was like a grave in which she lay, and not a creature troubled about her. She would try Mrs. Reschke.

When it was dark she appeared in the cellar. Mrs. Reschke

was walking about in the shop watering the flabby spinach and sticks of rhubarb.

"Now then," she said, and put down the watering-can with a jerk, "wot d'you want?" She was in a very bad temper, her head ached from the "Moselle" of the evening before, and—what was much worse—in spite of everything, Mr. Ladewig had not proposed.

Mina looked round timidly, they were alone. She seized her aunt's hand and stammered, a blush of shame on her wan face, "Where can I go? Aunt—help me—I don't know what to do—it'll soon be!" She thought she must sink into the ground when she had got it out.

Contrary to all expectation, Mrs. Reschke remained perfectly calm and only said, "So that's it?" and raised her eyebrows. And then in a tone of satisfaction, "I was right again! I've noticed it a long time."

"Aunt, aunt, what am I to do?"

"Do? There's nought to do. Go 'ome! They won't be just glad to see you, but thank yer stars you've got a 'ome to go to."

"Go home? No, no!"

Mrs. Reschke shrugged her shoulders. "Well, then—a nice kettle o' fish! That's wot your goin's on comes to. If you belonged to me *you'd* catch it! Ain't you ashamed o' yourself?" She took up the watering-can again and sprinkled the vegetables. "They don't keep a bit fresh! In the mornin' they're brought from the market, and by evenin' they're done for. It's enough to make a body despair!"

"Aunt!" Mina held her tightly by her dress, a terrible feeling of hopelessness seized her, and with it came despair. Suppose she were to desert her? She dare not desert her, she *must* help her!

Looking wildly into Mrs. Reschke's impassive face, she screamed, "Yer must help me!" Was *she* not the one? "Yer must!"

"Now then, must?" Mrs. Reschke freed herself angrily from Mina's grasp. "Am I to 'elp all the girls as go wrong? I'm a respectable woman, an' don't mix myself wi' that lot."

“Aunt!”

“Aunt? Let me be! ’Aven’t I allus said, keep yerself straight! But yer must be arter the men, every Sunday, nothin’ but pleasure, no eddication, no respect for yourselves, no decency, no——” She gasped for breath, she had gradually talked herself into a rage. “Don’t you come to me! Didn’t I take you in like me own child, git you a good place an’ give yer advice? But no, yer must be out an’ about like a wild thing. Much you’ve troubled about yer relations. An’ now when you’ve got yerself into a mess, you comes soon enough. It’s aunt here an’ aunt there. But I’m up to yer! Git out of the mess yourself, it ain’t got nothing to do with me. Nothin’ at all, I tell yer!” Mina had listened without uttering a sound; she stood there crushed, her head bowed low, her arms hanging loosely by her sides.

“’Ow do you look! Like a miserable sinner. Who is it then?” asked her aunt, rather more mildly. “’As ’e any money?”

No answer.

“Ah, I see, ain’t got nothing! A nice look-out. ’Ow could you be so stupid! Well, you’d better try and get into the hospital. There’s nothing to pay there.”

Into the hospital? A shudder ran through Mina’s frame—there where the young doctors learnt. Had not pale Minnie told her about it, and the other girls too? They only spoke of it in a whisper with raised eyebrows. There—where they were all allowed to look at you. She shivered with terror, and stretched out her hands as if warding off a danger.

“No, no, I’ll not go there! Help me; do ’e keep me here, aunt!” She grasped Mrs. Reschke’s wrists, and shook her with all her might. “Yer must keep me here!”

Mrs. Reschke was not so easily cowed; she twisted her hands free. “Now then, wot yer thinking of? Daft, ain’t yer? I’ll call Reschke, ’e’ll soon set yer to rights.” She had already raised her voice, “Resch——!”

Mina’s hand was quickly laid upon her mouth. “Hush!” the girl said in a voice that was strangely hoarse. And then with a significance that was not to be misunderstood, “Arthur!

Arthur—my Ar——!” Frau Reschke’s mouth remained open from fright.

Mina nodded. They looked at one another with staring eyes, pale faces and quivering lips.

Then Mrs. Reschke, shaking off her stupor, screamed loudly, “Arthur? That innercent child? It’s a lie!” Throwing herself upon Mina, she took her by her throat and shook her backwards and forwards. “Yer dares—my Arthur—I’ll teach yer—sich baseness—yer hussy! I’ll call the perlice—Reschke, Reschke!”

A flood of abuse followed. Mina fled.

She could not get up the cellar-steps quickly enough; the storm of furious words raged behind her, accompanied her up into the street.

Her feet would not obey her, her knees gave way. She felt as if she must drop. Somebody seized her by the arm.

“I’m going,” she stammered, frightened.

“Mina!”

That was Maggie’s voice! To-day it sounded like music.

“Will yer come with me to the ’all in the Bahnstrasse? Do come! Come!”

Mina allowed herself to be led away. Through the darkening spring night she walked as in a dream holding the child’s hand.

There was a shrill whistle. They were going under the viaduct, a train dashed along above them, the engine snorted, with two fiery eyes the monster stared into the night. Mina uttered a cry—was it not rushing after her? would it not seize her and crush her under its weight? She was quite confused.

Now they came to a fence, now to a little door. It was difficult to find the way, but Maggie knew it. Through the wicket, which a dimly-burning lantern scarcely disclosed, she walked steadily into a long, dark passage, between two high walls of boarding; her foot struck against no stone, gently but firmly she drew her cousin along with her.

Mina did not say a word. She did not care where she went, if only somewhere! In all her life she had never felt so forsaken, so miserable.

The passage came to an end, and there, between the piled-up



stock of a woodyard, between the smoky walls of gloomy back buildings, were lighted windows, shining into the darkness like kindly eyes.

They heard singing, accompanied by the rattling chords of an old piano. But the singing drowned the accompaniment, it swelled and thundered in the rhythm of a march, and ended with loud clappings of hands.

"It's begun!" Maggie pushed Mina along in front of her in her trembling desire to miss nothing. "Make 'aste!"

Before the entrance a fair girl in the Salvation Army dress welcomed her with a smile. "Hallelujah!" Maggie, usually so timid, returned the greeting confidently.

They entered. A wave of heat met them; the hall was crowded.

Young fellows, their hands in their trousers-pockets, caps with "Salvation Army" on their heads, stood at both sides of the door. They talked together quite freely and with smiling looks.

On all faces there was a smile, wherever Mina looked. Maggie smiled too, her pale face beamed and flushed; she went up boldly to the top and sat down on one of the front benches. The people moved willingly and made room for Mina too.

It was still warmer here; the great lamp with polished metal reflector hung just over their heads. There was a humming and a buzzing, a perpetual whispering going on in the ranks of the audience; none of them could keep their feet still, they stirred and shifted in restless expectation.

Heavy toil-worn faces. Mina thought she knew several of them; artisans, workmen's wives from the neighbourhood. But they all looked different, or was it the pleased, bright smile that changed them so? They bent forward and whispered together; a perpetual movement went through the meeting, like the wind passing over ripe corn.

Hallelujah girls went about and distributed papers. "Hymn-book of the Salvation Army, one penny!"

Mina, who had no money, looked furtively into her neighbour's book.

"Save thy soul!

Come to-day,

To-day is the day of salvation,  
 To-day is the acceptable time,  
 Come to-day."

As she could not see very well to read more, her neighbour kindly handed her the little book.

"Oh come, oh come, and go with me,  
 Where joy for ever waits,  
 Where thou shalt wear the starry crown,  
 And enter Heaven's gates."

She read it with difficulty, with eyes that slowly filled with tears. Oh, she did not want a starry crown; what should she do with it? Only a place of refuge.

With swimming eyes she looked round her—had they all found a refuge? Yes, yes: they seemed so happy. Was there any one among them who wanted a refuge as badly as she did now? A sudden longing came over her; she held the paper quite close to her face, she would read once more what was written on it. There—she started up.

A single voice said loudly—

"Oh, Saviour, yes, I come!"

And with a hollow murmur the whole assembly repeated—

"Oh, Saviour, yes, I come!"

All fell on their knees.

"Oh, Saviour, I come, I come, I come!"

Mina heard it in every kind of voice, from men, women, girls, youths, children. "I come, I come——" Begun softly as a murmur, it rose to a loud confusion of voices, it grew to a war-cry.

The hands were not folded, but clapped gaily. Now some one rushed to the piano and drummed on it, and a girl in a poke-bonnet raised her shrill voice, a voice that went through you—

"Joy, joy, joy, for joy of heart I sing,  
 Joy, joy, joy, the devil's driven away!"

And all joined in—

“Joy, joy, joy!”

It sounded like the music of a polka ; all the feet beat time. Their eyes sparkled as if they were going to dance.

And the singing went on, endlessly, endlessly, endlessly. Sometimes they stood, sometimes they sat ; sometimes they fell on their knees, sometimes they clapped their hands.

Mina’s right-hand neighbour, an elderly working-woman, with a wrinkled face, almost jumped up and down, shouting jubilantly, “Joy, joy, joy!”

To her left Maggie was kneeling, hot and flushed, her eyes closed, her face raised with an overwrought mute expression of ecstasy on it.

“Joy, joy, joy,” from all sides. Everywhere joy, laughing faces, a frenzy had taken possession of them all. One spoke, another sang, this one whispered, that one screamed—it sounded as if they were light-headed—“Joy, joy, joy!”

It crept through the ranks like fever, the “joy, joy” was contagious. To hear nothing else, see nothing else, think nothing else. A sort of stupor seemed to be coming over Mina ; the singing swelled and broke round her like mighty waves.

She moved nearer to Maggie and nudged her. “Maggie, isn’t true?”

“Hallelujah!” murmured Maggie, and did not stir.

Three men now appeared on the platform. A voice called out, “Listen to the hymn of the saved ; Sergeant Kemp, Lieutenant Grigg and Cadet Fryman will sing us the beautiful hymn of the saved soul. Hallelujah!”

“Hallelujah!”

And the three began—

“Oh, how pleasant it is to be saved,  
A life full of joy and sunshine and praise!”

The voices were rough, the singing unmusical, but the listeners nodded, entranced.

Then Sergeant Kemp spoke rapidly and impressively ; he was an ordinary looking workman, no longer young, but his heavy face with the stereotype smile on it became more and more animated as he went on—

“Thank God that He has brought me here ; I am so happy that I am in the Salvation Army, for here I can confess my faith. I can confess how I, a wicked sinner, was saved, how I came to Jesus, who shed His blood for me—for you too, my brother, for you too, my sister, for you too. Don’t say, ‘ Jesus Christ hasn’t come for me.’ For whom has He come? For you, for you !”

It seemed to Mina as if the speaker looked at her especially. His voice became more impressive, it stole caressingly into her ear.

“Come to Him. He will give you joy. Not only joy in Heaven—no, joy upon earth, glorious joy, floods of joy, joy, peace, power, riches, happiness. All in Jesus. Come you who hunger and suffer ; come to Him. Not the day after to-morrow, not to-morrow—remember, you must die. No, to-day ! Now ! This hour ! This minute ! This second ! Salvation is for all !”

“Hallelujah !” murmured the listeners.

The eyes of the speaker opened still wider ; they seemed to penetrate the ranks, to be directed at every single person. He spoke more and more rapidly, as if glowing with inward fire.

“He is here ! Jesus Christ is here ! Who is here ? Jesus Christ, your Friend, your Brother—to-day, now, in our midst !”

An enraptured “ Ah !” echoed through the hall.

“Do you not see Him ? . . . There He stands !”

The speaker stretched out his arm, a quiver ran through it down to his finger-tips. And these trembling fingers pointed to one spot. He repeated persistently, over and over again, “There He stands ! There He stands ! There He stands !”

That sounded like a conjuration. They all stood up, their heads stretched forward, their eyes fixed on one spot.

“Do you see Him ?”

“Hallelujah !”

“Do you see Him—there He stands ! He smiles at you, He gives you His hand. Do you feel His hand ? Do you touch His garment ? You touch His garment ! Do you bend the knee ? You bend the knee ! Do you repent of your sins ? You repent of your sins ! Do you look into His face ? You look into His face ! Do you receive His kiss ? Yes, you receive it ! You are no more sinful, you are no more poor—rich, rich, happy, saved !

Come here, child of God, happy soldier of the Salvation Army! Fight under the banner, yellow, red and blue—Hallelujah!”

Exhausted, the speaker stopped for breath. “Hallelujah, Hallelujah!” surged through the hall. Great excitement had taken possession of them all; no one sat down, they all stood on tiptoe: who would announce themselves as saved to-day? How many would it be this time?

Above the murmuring, whispering, buzzing rose the penetrating voice of the speaker—

“Where is the first soul—where, where? Brother, sister, where are you going to, Heaven or Hell? Think of eternity! Save your soul!” It sounded imploring, threatening, entreating: “Save, save your soul!”

A high girl's voice intoned—

“Whiter than snow, yes, whiter than snow!”

And a powerful chorus took it up—

“O wash me in blood that is whiter than snow!”

Again the speaker was heard—

“The Devil and the Salvation Army hate one another. So many people persecute the Salvation Army because they are in the power of the Devil. Look here! Angel and Devil and the poor Soul!”

On the platform appeared three figures. Mina recognized the pretty, fair girl who had stood at the entrance; she had put a white cloth over her head and hidden her dress under a large, white sheet. She was the Angel.

Opposite the Angel stood the Devil, a shaggy skin over his shoulders, two horns tied to his forehead.

And between them a young girl, half child, half maiden: the poor Soul.

“Where does this way lead to?” asked the Soul in a timid voice. “I live in darkness, there is nobody who will show me the way.”

“I will show you the way.” The Devil disguised his rough voice quite cleverly. “Come here, dear Soul, give me your hand,

then you will wander on flowery paths, and the way will be pleasant. I will give you jewels and beautiful clothes, gold chains and diamond rings. You shall go to balls and concerts, shall sing and dance, shall be pleasant to the eyes ; you shall have friends and lovers, your hair will hang in curly locks, joy will take you by the hand."

"Who are you? Oh, tell me who you are, dear stranger!"

"I am a prince, a mighty prince. Mine are the lands from sunrise to sunset. Mine is the whole world."

"Do not believe him," interrupted the Angel hastily ; "it is true, he is a prince, but a prince of hell. Do not put on the gold chains and the diamond rings, they are the snares with which hell will entrap you. Do not adorn yourself with beautiful clothes, they are the garments of sin. Wear no curls, they are traps laid by guile. Do not go after pleasures, they are inventions of the evil one. Do not listen to what friends and lovers say, it is the Devil that speaks. He will destroy you ; he drags you down into the mire—you sink in deeper and deeper. Your heart is under—the mud rises higher and higher. Now it has reached your neck, now your mouth is full ; you groan, you gurgle, you choke—and the Devil comes quickly, takes your soul, and throws it into a glowing furnace, the flames of perdition blaze round you, your beautiful curls become fiery serpents which writhe round your head—oh, you poor Soul!"

A piercing shriek startled Mina. Maggie had sprung up, stretched out both hands in front of her, and screamed loudly, "Gertrude!" Then she collapsed and fell forward, striking her forehead against the bench in front.

Mina did what she could for her. She held her in her arms ; all Maggie's limbs were convulsed, she gnashed her teeth and turned up her eyes.

Nobody took any notice of them. Mina looked round for help, but all eyes were fastened on the platform where Angel and Devil tugged at the poor Soul.

Breathless expectation, feverish interest. At last the triumphal song of the Angel—

"Saved, saved! Come unto me, here is salvation! Enter the Salvation Army—where is the first soul? Where, where?"

"Hallelujah, Hallelujah!" A young, well-dressed woman rushed on to the platform.

"I was a wicked sinner, I wore fine clothes, I danced. Hallelujah, now I am saved. Oh, how pleasant it is to be saved, saved, saved!"

"Are there more souls there? No more souls?"

The officers distributed themselves about the hall and examined the rows of people closely.

"Not another soul? Save, save your soul!"

And others rushed on to the platform, men and women, in wild confusion, and all confessed their sinfulness, and returned thanks for being saved.

A jubilant frenzy had taken possession of them all.

"Hallelujah, Hallelujah!" sounded from all parts of the room. The piano groaned under the thumped chords, the singing rang from a hundred throats as if from one—

"Over me, over me, the waters roar,  
As into the flood I plunge—  
Over me, over me, the waters roar,  
Washing me whiter than snow!"

Was the ceiling falling? Mina felt as if an immense weight was pressing down upon them. Ah, the terrible air here! She looked round puzzled; had they all gone mad? How could she ever have thought of finding a refuge here? If she had not been so sad she would have laughed. She gave all her attention to Maggie now. Although her thin, little body was light, in her deep faint it took all Mina's strength to bring her to the entrance.

Outside Maggie soon opened her eyes.

Mina sat down on a beam and took her head on her lap.

"Maggie, what is it? How are yer now?"

"I often feel bad," whispered the girl. "An' then I was hungry, and then I thought of——"

She said no more, a shudder ran through her frame.

Arm in arm they stole along the dark alley between the walls of boarding. Only a small piece of the sky was to be seen with stars dimly gleaming on it.

## XIX

MINA had lost all hope. It was the last evening before leaving her place. She sat in the kitchen, her elbows on the table, her head resting on her hand.

Mr. and Mrs. Beak were at home; from the sitting-room sounded gay talk and laughter, gayer than the song of the canary. But they were good people. Mr. Beak had just come out to her and paid her her wages; perhaps he would not find her there to-morrow when he came from the bank, the new girl was to arrive quite early. He had put down five shillings more than her wages on the kitchen-table, and had said, "You have always been very attentive to my wife. You might have stayed with us for years—I am sorry."

She was obliged to weep; she wept unceasingly. But now she had no more tears; her eyes were dry. To-morrow at this time she would be in the street—yes, in the street. If only it were good weather; rain would spoil her basket. She did not even know where she could leave it. At Arthur's? Ah, he could not keep his room if he had lost his situation. At the Reschkes? They had turned her out. At Bertha's? Yes, that was an idea! She came from her village; she would not desert a comrade. Suppose she were to go there this evening and ask her?

She got up heavily and knocked at the sitting-room door; they would not mind her going out, but she would like to tell them. Inside such chattering and tittering; her knock was not heard. So she stole away softly and left the house.

It was a mild, warm evening, an evening full of the promise of spring. There was a sweet scent from the old trees in the Potsdamerstrasse; all the brown buds seemed to have life. Deep down in the tree there was movement, a stirring, a swelling, a pressing forward to the light.

As Mina walked along she felt something stir within her, a restless movement, a warning throb—a pressing forward to the light.



Suddenly she thought of her home. Like a vision, far, far away, through the branches which shone damp and silvery in the light of the lamps, she saw the meadows there. The earth now opened its lap, the smell of the fields was of food and prosperity. Young seed sprouted, green and fresh, the colour of hope, and all eyes dwelt on it with joy.

She could not have put it into words, but she felt it unconsciously and with dull pain: nobody would greet the fruit of her body with joy.

Her steps became slower and slower, heavier and heavier. Now she was at the Selingers' house; she stole timidly past the porter's lodge, across the dark court, and up the back-stairs. If only the cook was not there. She was shy of her.

She had not quite got up-stairs when she heard loud and excited talking.

"It's a burning shame," screamed Bertha's voice. "How dare yer say I'd took one of the tarts? I don't know how many there were. If one of the tarts is missing you've took it."

"Now then," screamed the cook in return, "'old yer dirty tongue or I'll tell the missus quite other things about you, yer little hussy! Who licks the plates, eh? I've lived in good 'ouses fifteen years an' have had so much of the stuff in me 'ands that I don't care about it. An' now I'm to be suspected an' 'ear from the missus that I take things. But it'll all come out. Yer think I didn't see ye t'other day opening the sideboard with another key an' 'elping yourself!"

"Marie!" screamed Bertha shriller.

"Yes, now yer frightened. I know all about it. I've 'ad my eye on you for a long time. Yer was so busy eating, yer couldn't hear, an' yer couldn't see. If the missus comes to me again, I'll soon tell 'er. An' now we know why the other cooks didn't stay!"

"I'll tell Mrs. Selinger that you've a child! I'll tell her that yer young man is here o' nights——"

Smack! A resounding box on the ears.

"Yer can 'ave another, if you likes! My young man don't carry nothing away, 'e don't take things, like other people. You're a nice 'un to talk about others, you are!"

A door inside was banged furiously.

Mina knocked.

Bertha opened the door; she was flushed, her face looked swollen, her eyes wild. "What d'ye want?" she asked hastily.

"Oh, Bertha!" said Mina, quite taken aback by what she had heard, and put her foot quickly inside the door, for Bertha seemed going to shut it again.

"Well, what's the matter? Quick, I've no time!"

"Oh, Bertha, I must tell you something, things are not going well with me—no, very badly!"

She stopped; Bertha heard nothing of what she said, she had turned her head and was listening back into the flat. Mina felt she had come at an unfortunate time; but could she wait?

With the resolution of utter distress she brought out, "Take care of my basket for me! They've give me notice—I haven't another place, shan't get one, I'm"—trembling, she drew a deep breath, she could not get it over her lips—"I'm—I'm—Oh, yer sees! Take my things for me till I know where to go! Good God, where shall I go?"

It was a cry of despair which the stone walls of the landing echoed back.

Bertha remained as cold as ice. "Yes," she said, and shrugged her shoulders, "I could have told ye before that 'ud be the end of it! I'd take yer basket, but who knows how long I shall be here?" She looked round again restlessly. "Don't think long. An' if I'm to go, then the sooner the better—you must leave yer basket somewheres else."

"My good things—to be thrown about so!" moaned Mina, and let her head drop on her breast.

Bertha glanced swiftly at the bowed figure, then touched for the moment by a vague feeling of pity, she said, "Wait, Mina, yer money! I haven't given ye back all the ten shillings, there's three to come! Here are five, you'll want 'em."

And before Mina could reply Bertha murmured, "I haven't any time now—good-bye!" And shut the door in her face.

Pressing the five-shilling piece convulsively in her hand Mina left the house.

Where should she go?

Torn clouds sailed rapidly across the evening sky, a warm rain watered the earth.

No refuge, however much she strained her burning eyes to look about her. As long as she had a few shillings she was safe, somebody would take her in—but then—then?

In her terror her feet gave way; she sank down on the stone steps of a house. A stray dog, that was wandering about, came and snuffled at her feet. She did not dare kick him away. As if searching for a support she put out her hands and then clasped them tightly. She wanted to weep, but could not, her face only twitched pitifully. Her head sank lower and lower, she cowered.

Mina did not notice that she was attracting the attention of the passers-by; only when the porter of the house came out, "What are you sittin' here for?" she started up. As quickly as she could she ran away without answering.

How far she had run she did not know; the Göbenstrasse was at some distance behind her. These streets were darker, more lonely. She trotted on farther and farther, beside herself with fear; she only wanted to get deeper and deeper into the darkness where nobody would see her.

She perspired and shivered with cold at the same time. All at once the rows of houses on both sides began to reel, the lights danced backwards and forwards, the ground under her feet rocked, there was darkness before her eyes, a deafening roar in her ears. With a groan she clung to the nearest lamp-post and tried to hold on to it. . . .

"Is anything the matter with you?" a voice suddenly asked. Quite a crowd of people were standing round her.

"Oh, the poor woman," said a young girl, "I'll fetch a glass o' water quickly!"

From a cellar near a man brought a chair. "Sit 'e down!"

Several hands pressed her down on it.

"Are you hungry?" "'Ave you 'urt yourself?" "Wot's the matter?" "Shall I bring you to the 'orspital?" The voices buzzed round Mina.

She was dreadfully ashamed. "Thank you," she murmured shyly. And then with a desperate exertion of strength she got

up, repelled the people who crowded round her, forced herself to walk and went straight off.

She *was* proud! The sympathizers let her go.

But Mina was still giddy; she would have fallen if a hand had not been pushed under her arm. A soft rather husky voice said good-naturedly, "It's bad to be took so ill in the street! An' then all the people that comes! I'll bring ye home, where d'ye live?"

Mina began to tremble, the other looked anxiously into her face.

"Oh! Good gracious me, now I know ye! We've often met in the Reschkes' cellar! Ain't you the niece? Didn't I think this mornin' when a spider ran over the wall that something special 'ud happen. But I didn't think it was meant for you! Don't you know me? I'm Matilda that used to be at the captain's! Yer must know me—little Matilda!"

"Yes, yes!" Mina smiled faintly and then pressed Matilda's hand convulsively. "Take me away—please! I'm so—so——"

A dry sobbing, that she could not suppress, would not let her go on. She clung silently to Matilda.

And she, pressing the exhausted girl's arm closely to her, said, "Come up wi' me! I live quite close, on the way to Tempelhofer Field, on the fourth floor in the court. If it isn't too high for ye? Well then, come up at once!"

In the poor little room of the great dwelling-house, from garret to cellar inhabited by the lowest of the working classes, Mina told her story. She told it with prolixity, with many repetitions, she thought of every detail. Her heart seemed freed from an iron band. It was the first time that she had unbosomed herself to anybody.

Matilda had given her the only chair. She herself sat on her basket, had taken Mina's trembling hands between hers, and looked at her pityingly with her dreamy eyes. At last she wept.

"Yes, yes, that's how it is with us! A child—an' then—then he saw my sister, an' she was younger an' better looking. An' then he left me. I'm not angry, he still loves me. An' the book says too that *she'll* die and then he'll come back to me—an' soon.

I've waited a good time!" She was silent and looked dreamily in front of her.

Mina was silent, each was wrapped in her own especial thoughts.

"What have ye done with the child?" asked Mina, suddenly rousing herself.

"The child? What child? Oh, the child! It was quite a little child an' the good God took it. It was best for the little angel—an' for me too. I could go into service again."

"An' I——?" Mina slipped from her chair and fell on her knees before the other. "I don't know where to go!"

Her head dropped on to Matilda's lap; she smoothed Mina's tumbled hair gently.

"But no, dear, no, you mustn't despair. Get up, sit 'e down there—wait, I'll warm you a cup of coffee!"

She bustled about making a fire in the iron stove, which could also be used for cooking, with some paper and wood. All the time she went on talking in an undertone, as if speaking to herself, "It'll all come right, we'll ask the book, an' what that says is true; keep up yer courage!"

Mina looked round the room longingly; it was lighted by a little kitchen-lamp with a brass reflector, on the table was a work-box, by it a man's unfinished shirt. At the window, half hidden by the thin curtain, was a flourishing myrtle-tree in a flower-pot. Not a sound from the street could be heard up here, the little room was quiet and cosy in spite of its bare walls.

Matilda tripped busily backwards and forwards; now she poured the coffee into her best cup, a beautiful one with a gold border, which the children had given her on her birthday once when she was in a good situation. "May happiness attend you" stood on it.

She brought a roll, too, and a little dripping in a broken saucer. Hospitably she pressed Mina to begin and held the cup to her lips.

"Drink some! Do! Coffee keeps body and soul together. I drink coffee in the morning, at dinner an' in the evening. Then you've always something warm in yer stomach. My mother used to say, 'Matilda dear, drink coffee, it's good for ye! It's a gift o'

God!' An' then she told the future from the grounds. That was the old fashion. We're more for what's printed!"

Mina sipped the thin, light brown fluid, and derived great benefit from it. She felt revived, fresher, almost hopeful. "Oh, if I could only stay here," she sighed gently.

"But you can," said Matilda quickly. "I didn't like to offer. I don't know how long it'll be 'fore I make a change. D'ye see"—she lifted the half-finished shirt from the table—"that's the seventh; I'm making him a whole dozen! My things are long ready!" With a proud and beaming face she pointed to a box under her bed. "But you can come, it'll only be decent to wait a while before marryin'!"

"Can I—can I come to-morrow?" stammered Mina. Then she kissed Matilda. "I'll never forget what you've done for me!"

Matilda laughed. "But no, dear, don't talk so! I wouldn't think of forsaking ye. The bed's small but we won't quarrel. I can't offer you more, the linen an' all the other things has cost so much, an' out o' work too! That runs away wi' the savings. But he earns good wages!" . . .

Mina was no longer weighed down by her position. She felt relieved, she knew where to go.

The following afternoon she left the Beaks without any one to wish her God-speed. The master was at the office, the young wife was having her midday nap, and had said good-bye to her through the new girl. And so she went away with Matilda, who waited at the back-door to help her carry her box.

She would like to have spoken to Arthur, or at least to have sent him a message through Maggie, but nobody was to be seen before the blue varnished door, and she scarcely ventured to go near the cellar. Hesitating, with a long, lingering look she passed along the opposite pavement. What was he doing? Would he go to his parents again, now he was earning nothing? She was not angry with him that she had heard nothing from him since Sunday; it was quite natural, he must first find employment. As soon as she was settled she would write him a card, "I'm very comfortable here, come an' see me as soon as yer can.—Ever your Mina."

When she had nearly reached the end of the Göbenstrasse, a cab came rattling along. A beautiful, shiny chest of drawers

swayed on the box by the driver; inside sat Bertha, surrounded by cardboard boxes and parcels. When she recognized Mina she stopped the cab and jumped out. She was feverishly excited, her brows were knit and flushed.

She laughed, a forced, hard laugh. "Oh, you're going! I'm off too! They carried it a bit too far! Haha-haha! The cook picks an' steals an' puts it on to me—a miserable little tart's missing—an' the old woman believes her! Yesterday evening we had a reg'lar row, I and Mrs. Selinger. I told her what I thought o' her! 'D'you think,' I said, 'anybody's goin' to get fat on your boiled-out beef, an' yer tasteless carrots, that the cows eat at home? I'm astonished myself that I've stood it so long. You'll never get a decent girl to stay, all along o' your son!' She looked at me as if she could eat me, turned up her nose and said quite haughty, 'What has my son to do with you?'

"'Oh, ho,' I said quite bold, 'very much, an' no decent girl's goin' to put up with it! An' I give you notice, ma'am.'

"'You should ha' seen her! She was that mad. 'I could go at once,' she screamed. 'On the spot!' She almost cried, she was so angry. First I was furious too, but I had to laugh, she was in a greater temper than I. And I said, 'No, ma'am, not at once, but to-morrow!'

"'Then she screamed again, I must wait till the fifteenth, a fortnight's notice had to be given.

"'But I said, 'No, ma'am, I don't stay where I'm so insulted! An' you said yourself, ma'am, I could go at once. I'm not your slave!'

"'She were in a way—where's she goin' to get another such good servant, an' all at once too? An' so we went on quarrellin' for a bit till Leo comes. I did get a fright. But he were that sweet an' wanted to make peace. But when I heard him soft-soapin' I couldn't stand it, I could ha' spit in his face. I did get mad! He has plagued me so! An' I gave it him, I didn't forget anything!

"'Now you'd think that the missus would ha' been beside herself! Not a bit o' it! She shook her finger at him, 'Oh, Leo!'

"'An' he grinned all over his face an' said, 'Don't listen to servants' gossip any longer! You only upset yourself, mamma!'

“An’ she said, ‘Such a deceitful person! You are quite right, my son! Come!’”

“But she’s given it me in my character; Leo helped her write it. I’ll pay her back when I get a chance!”

Bertha trembled with excitement. “An’ to think I must put up wi’ that!”

“Oh,” said Mina, “you’ve got no place now!”

“Don’t care! Mrs. Reschke must take me in, till I’ve found something. That don’t trouble me. But I mean to have a good look at the people first. Haha! They look at us, back an’ front. Well, where yer going to? Tell me an’ I’ll come an’ see yer sometime!”

Mina gave her her hand. “I’ll be real glad, if you’ll come. I’m goin’ to Matilda for the present out in the Colonnenstrasse, it’s the last house, fourth floor, in the court. Yer look straight on to Tempelhofer Field there.”

“Now, young woman,” said the cabman, and cracked his whip, “have you soon done? Pity I can’t offer you a chair!”

“You’d like to join in,” returned Bertha pertly, and skipped back into the cab. “Well, then, off with you. Number eight!” Laughing gaily she drove off.

Slowly, carrying their load with difficulty, the two others continued their way.

## XX

THE same day, some hours before Bertha drove up to the Reschkes’, Arthur had appeared there again. He came with bag and baggage; it was not much, not more than he could conveniently carry; his best things he had pawned.

He entered the cellar whistling, as if quite at ease, his hat on one side of his untidy head, but his eyes were restless. The bell tinkled and jingled and squeaked malignantly. With a short laugh he threw down his parcel. “Mornin’! Back in the old hole again!”



Ella, who greeted him with a shout of joy—

“That is Arthur,  
With the curly locks,”

got such a box on her ears that her head wagged. With a loud wail she rushed to the glass door.

“He’s hitting me! He’s hurt me!”

She woke up Father Reschke, who was still sleeping, and thus rudely aroused began to look for his slippers with an angry grunt.

Mrs. Reschke, alarmed, rushed from behind the counter “Ella, ’old yer tongue. Yer brat! Arthur, for goodness’ sake, Arthur, wot are you thinking of? ’Ere’s a chocolate. Ella, be quiet now! Children, don’t quarrel, yer makes me quite nervous!”

“She isn’t to sing that,” grumbled Arthur. “Will you be quiet? You dare do it again!”

It was not necessary for Ella to set up another cry, for Father Reschke had flung open the glass door. He stood on the threshold in his down-at-heel slippers, pulling up his trousers with both hands.

“Wot the devil’s the matter? Wot’s all this row about in the early mornin’?”

“Early mornin’!” snapped Mrs. Reschke. “Can’t exactly say it’s early mornin’! Almost twelve! You’d do better to dress yerself!”

“Going to,” he grumbled. “Needn’t take yer mouth so full all at once. Now then, Arthur, wot’s the meaning o’ this?”

Ella had fallen upon Arthur’s newspaper parcel, opened it, and taken out her brother’s possessions. Mr. Reschke kicked them out of his way crossly. He was very often in a bad temper now, not only because his wife blew him up every day about his purchases in the Central Market Hall, and said that the falling-off of their customers was all his fault, but also because his eyes had been troubling him for some time. He had bought spectacles and yet he could not see well. When he came into the broad daylight his eyes ran, and he blinked. He put it down to his age, he was getting on for sixty, and you could not expect much

then. With a kind of longing he began to think of the time when, as a boy, with eyes as sharp as a falcon's, he had looked over the green meadows into the far distance.

Now he gave his wife an angry look out of the corner of his eyes and grunted, "Can't even 'ave my sleep out, allus being jawed at. . . . Now then, Arthur, wot d'you bring all that 'ere for? Eh?"

Arthur gave his mother a quick glance.

She answered at once, "Arthur'll stop a few days with us. That weren't nothing, the place at the lawyer's. I persuaded 'im to give it up. 'E can help us till 'e finds something better!"

"'Elp us? We ain't got enough to do ourselves!"

"You, p'raps! I've known for a long time that you does nothin'. We'd be different off to-day if you was different! But there's nought to be done with you, yer can't say 'Bo' to a goose. If it ain't to-day, it'll do to-morrow! Yer can lie in bed all the mornin', an' swill down one glass o' beer arter another! An' I can toil an' moil in the shop till I ain't got a leg to stand upon, an' talk till I'm out o' breath, an' all for a halfpenny!"

"Well, mother, I didn't think you were just overworked now! There's times when a cat don't come. Ain't much doing in the mornings either!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Child's play!"

"Child's play!—wot?" Now Mrs. Reschke's back was up. "D'you know anythin' about it? Yer don't know what work is! You'd have starved long ago, if it hadn't been for me! You're a nice lazy 'un!"

Now Reschke was furious, but he did not quite dare to let out his rage on his wife. So he flew at his son: "Lost yer place again? Is that right an' proper? Oughter be ashamed o' yourself, to idle about an' then come down on yer parents! But I've 'ad enough of it! An' I tell ye wot, either yer gets a new place in two days, or I shows you where the door is!"

"Try it on!" shrieked Mrs. Reschke. "Arthur can come as often as 'e likes, an' stay as long as 'e likes. Arthur, my son, go in an' put yer things in the little room. As soon as Gertrude comes from business she shall take out 'ers. Go, go," she said

encouragingly as he still hesitated. "That 'ud be a nice thing to forbid the son of the 'ouse!"

"Son!—son! Hahahaha!" Reschke laughed hoarsely.

"Yes," she screamed; "son! There's nothin' to laugh at!" And when her husband retired from the threshold with a grimace she ran after him. "I brought thirty-five pounds with me when I married ye; I'm not goin' to 'ave Arthur forbid the 'ouse—my son!"

"*Your* son, yes, but not *my* son," he roared at her.

Bang, she slammed the door behind her. The children in the shop heard their parents continue their quarrel in the room.

With a groan Arthur sank on the inverted tub and covered his eyes with both hands. He did not want to hear the squabbling inside and yet he listened, it was like thunder in his ears.

"Oh, dear," whispered Ella, who was standing on tiptoe, her head stretched forward in an attitude of strained attention, "now they're fightin'!"

Arthur sprang up. His face had a savage expression. He felt as if the cellar walls would fall in upon him. And was not Mina coming down the cellar-steps, and with her figure blocking up the way to light and liberty?

"Go in, Ella," he said, in a forced, strangely trembling voice; "you go in!"

And as she slipped into the room, half pushed by him, half driven by her curiosity, he looked round wildly panting for breath.

Away, away, he could not stop here! He could not stand it; he must go. He must get out of the cellar!

His restless, wandering eyes fell on the counter—he hadn't a shilling, not a stiver! And there was the till! . . .

The key was in—the drawer was even half open. There was not much in it, all small coins—but stop, there was a piece of gold in the special compartment and several half-crown pieces!

He put in his hand hurriedly. . . . No, he would not take all. He threw the crowns back again. Only the sovereign, to keep him from immediate want. He would give it them back soon.

His pulses throbbed, the blood had gone to his head, and roared in his ears. . . . Thief, thief! His eyes started out of their sockets. He looked round, trembling, hesitating.

From the room came a furious oath, a crash, a sound of something falling, a clattering. Steps approached the glass door.

He gathered up his bundle and rushed away. When Mother Reschke, a few minutes later, came out of the room with one eye quite swollen up, the cellar was empty.

"Where's Arthur?" she asked Ella, who slipped in after her like a squirrel.

"Gone," said the child absently; she was just considering what she could best get out of her mother. When her parents quarrelled she was in luck's way: each one tried to win her over, and the end was that she got something from both.

When Gertrude came home she refused to turn out of the little room; she begged and wept: she could not sleep with Maggie! It was all of no use, she had to carry her things into the kitchen. But she grumbled and sulked—she would rather stay out half the night!

Gertrude need not have remained away so long that evening. When she drummed very late at the blue varnished door, late the first time for months, an obstinate look on her face, her hat tilted on her blown-about hair, Maggie came and whispered to her she was to go softly into her room, Arthur was not there.

"What, Arthur not come? That's splendid. If I'd only known!" Now only she noticed that Maggie was weeping. "What's the matter? Had a beating?"

Maggie made no answer, she only shook her head and sobbed heartrendingly.

"How can you?" said Gertrude carelessly. It did not interest her further. She was dead tired and felt what a relief it was to have her room to herself.

But she was not to have her bed to herself; she found Bertha in it, who was to have slept on the sofa with Ella, but now that Arthur was not there she had made herself very comfortable in better quarters. She lay right across. Gertrude had to wake her if she wanted to find room.

Bertha started up, her eyes full of sleep. When she saw Gertrude's peevish face she laughed and was wide awake at once. She sat up quickly and rested her head on her hand; her long, fair hair fell in waves over her bare arm. She looked on while Gertrude undressed by the light of a flickering candle-end.

"Enjoyed yourself, Gertie?" She pressed her golden eyelashes together and looked at the other knowingly.

"No!" Gertrude kicked off her boots, they flew into a corner.

"Don't be so angry, Gertie! Wasn't 'he' there?"

"What 'he'?"

"I only meant 'he'! You know Potsdamerstrasse begins with L!"

"What's that to do with me?" The light was blown out in a moment and she was in bed.

There she lay quite exhausted and yet she could not sleep. She longed to question Bertha about Leo Selinger. But to be so familiar with a servant-girl—that would not do! And yet she was dying of curiosity.

Bertha helped her out of this dilemma by beginning to talk herself, and telling her every little detail about Leo Selinger. He was a nice one!

With sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks Gertrude listened—how glad she was that Bertha had made him feel her claws! It was a pity that she had not told him what she thought of him! But he had caught it after all! She drew a deep breath and pressed Bertha's hand.

And so the two became fast friends in the night. They did not think of sleeping, they had too many interesting things to talk about.

With the girl who served in the same department as herself, the girl's young man, and the brother of the young man, Gertrude had spent the evening in the Winter-garden, then they had gone to a beer restaurant, and afterwards to a night café. "You can come too," she said to Bertha. "Make yourself fine, then nobody'll notice anything. I'll introduce you as my cousin. Tomorrow evening, shall we? The brother brought me home—only close by, he don't need to know I live in a cellar—an' he'll

sure to be about before the shop again. P'r'aps it'll be more fun with you!"

"We'll have a regular game with the boys," said Bertha, delighted.

Towards morning they had at last fallen asleep when a loud lamentation from Mother Reschke woke them up. Arthur had not returned with the new day as his mother had hoped. The poor boy! He had been so offended that he had run away! Now he would get wet in this uncertain spring weather, instead of sitting dry with mother at home! Everybody who came into the shop was told how cruelly Reschke had treated her Arthur. "'E's sure to catch something, with his delicate constitootion!" And she called Reschke a murderer.

She could not get over it the whole day, and Mr. Reschke crept about as if some one had given him a blow on the head.

Yesterday evening they had missed the sovereign; they were accustomed to make up the cash-accounts after the shop was closed and then to put the money under their pillow. Where was the sovereign? They searched in every corner. It must be stolen. Maggie, who as a rule was never in the shop, had been cowering in the dark corner behind the great mangle for a long time, she had been there quite alone for hours.

She was submitted to a strict examination; blows rained down on her uplifted, imploring hands. The cellar walls rang again with her wails and the furious cries of her mother.

This morning Ella had come—she knew something! With a knowing face she whispered into her mother's ear. No, that was not possible! Perhaps for the first time in her life Ella got a sounding box on the ears from her mother's hand. Arthur had taken the money? . . . No, no, impossible!

But Ella, weeping, persisted in her statement.

Mr. Reschke did not say much, he only gave his wife a strange look and murmured, "D'you see, your son!"

Then a storm broke out. No, that his mother could not believe, that she would not believe! And Mrs. Reschke vowed and protested he was a vile slanderer who said such things of Arthur!

But again and again she took Ella secretly aside and questioned

her ; and the child, excited by her own importance, told with more and more detail how Arthur had constantly glanced towards the till, and how he had then persuaded her to see what was going on in the room. " I didn't want to," she declared, " but he gave me a push, an' then I saw 'im run be'ind the counter an' go to the drawer ! "

Mrs. Reschke wept. For years no tears had come into her eyes, not when her mother died, not when she had buried Emil, her youngest but one—he had only been nine weeks old. But now she wept. The unwonted tears trickled slowly, one by one, from her eyes. But they burned all the more.

So the day dragged on. No sun in the sky, the cellar did not get light at all. If he would only come back. Perhaps he would come by stealth in the dusk, he did not dare for fear of his father ! He must know that his mother would not desert him !

When evening came Mrs. Reschke was so restless that she could stand it no longer ; she sent Maggie to the Kleine Mauerstrasse ; she was to inquire in Arthur's former lodgings. Perhaps he was there !

She even gave the girl a penny for the tram there and back, " But don't let me catch ye spending the money on sweets an' walkin'," she threatened her. " I don't let ye ride to save yer legs. I only want to get news o' Arthur ! "

Maggie came back in great trouble. Arthur had left there yesterday early, but the landlady had held her fast when she said she was his sister, threatened her and demanded the arrears of rent. And a man had come to his wife's help, and both had abused her dreadfully. Only when she had promised to tell her parents, and had given their exact address, had the angry people allowed her to go. She still trembled.

" Oh, you booby," screamed Mrs. Reschke, " *you* were the one to send ! Now we're let in for't ! Wot d'ye want to say that for."

And before Maggie knew what was coming, she had a box on the ears ; she went off crying and hid herself with the dogs.

The black shadows of evening crept into the cellar ; the darkness had never been so oppressive before. It was more than darkness.

They shuddered down there. Mother Reschke was chilly, and Father Reschke, who blinked his eyes more than ever to-day, moved nearer to his wife. They sat silently in the room at the back by the light of a dimly-burning lamp; not a creature came into the shop in front to-day, the new vegetable shop farther down the street was celebrating the jubilee of its six months' existence. Wine was to be had there, a glass gratis.

"It's only apple-wine," said Father Reschke at last, and then he sighed. "Wot'll they do next, that's another new fashion! Come, mother, let's be friends again!"

She raised her reddened eyelids and looked at him for the first time to-day, not exactly in a friendly way, but not unfriendly.

"I don't like the look o' yer eyes at all," she said. "But when yer begins to go to the doctor there's no end to it!"

He wiped his eyes. "Do it only seem so dark, or is't dark 'ere?"

"No, no, it's dark!"

She turned up the lamp till it flared, but still its faint gleam did not light up the room; the darkness was stronger. They sat silent again. . . .

Towards nine o'clock Gertrude came, Bertha had fetched her from the shop. They were both in very good spirits and laughed immoderately. And yet their laughter was not cheering; Father Reschke looked at them discontentedly.

"Now then, wot's up?"

"We're invited!" Gertrude whirled round on the point of one foot; then she took Bertha round the waist and danced with her into the next room.

"Who by?" called Mother Reschke after them, her curiosity a little aroused. "Ladewig?"

"Not he!" A loud giggle was Gertrude's answer.

"Wot 'as she got in 'er 'ead now!" Mother Reschke shook her head and then settled herself comfortably.

"If 'e'd only pop the question! You must take 'im in 'and, Reschke! That ain't right; squeeze 'er 'e can, but 'e don't propose." She sighed and sank back into her apathy.

In the little room the two young girls were dressing. They were in a great hurry. The young man had "shelved" his *fiancée*,



the girl who served in the same department with Gertrude, and was now waiting with his brother, and another friend of his brother's, in a restaurant near for the two "cousins." Gertrude did Bertha's hair. She puffed it out in the latest fashion, and curled the little locks on the temples and at the back of the neck. Smiling, Bertha looked at herself in the glass: she hardly recognized herself, every one would take her for a lady!

And then Gertrude powdered herself; she had taken to it lately, she thought it suited her when her cheeks were interestingly pale; her eyes, too, appeared all the darker and more sparkling for it. Bertha had to pull her stays to with all her might, till her waist was so small it looked as if it would snap.

Thus prepared they started for their evening's amusement. They laughed continually. Laughing, they scurried through the room, out into the cellar; their laughter sounded back loud and shrill mingled with the warning jangle of the bell which their hurrying, incautious steps had awakened.

The parents sat alone and solitary. Even Ella was not there, she had been about the streets with the children from the neighbourhood ever since the afternoon—goodness knows what had become of her.

Only a mouse was heard scratching under the sofa, and in the cupboard the scraping of the worms.

## XXI

SPRING had come, suddenly and triumphantly. The buds of the lilac, which thrives so well in the sand of the Mark, showed a bluish-red shimmer, and the chestnuts had put out their candles. The sky was a deeper blue, the sun a warmer gold.

In the Reschkes' cellar there was still winter weather. Mrs. Reschke had visibly fallen away in the last few weeks; she had not exactly got thin, the fat was there, but her plumpness gone. Her flesh was flabby.

Three times she had put a notice in the *Lokalanzeiger*, "Arthur, come back, all is forgiven!"

He could not have seen it. And so she did not grudge the expense, and advertised a third and fourth time. It was money thrown away!

The constant anxiety told on Mrs. Reschke, and when she managed to forget the affair with Arthur she worried herself ill over the affair with Gertrude.

She had been so sure of this engagement with Ladewig. He seemed so much in love, sat there every Sunday for hours, and allowed himself to be fêted. But when Father Reschke, after repeated exhortations from his wife, took him to task, he made excuses. And when Mother Reschke came to her husband's help, and hinted that he had deeply compromised her daughter and that she must consider herself as engaged to him, he had not appeared in the cellar again. And he only replied to a letter, addressed to him by the offended mother in very plain language, by an announcement in the *Lokalanzeiger*, which the Reschkes received by post—

"I herewith declare that my engagement with Miss Gertrude Reschke is broken off.

"HERMANN LADEWIG,  
"Grocer, Kottbus."

That was too much! Mrs. Reschke almost broke down. She had lost much of her talkativeness. For a quarter of an hour she could sit in brooding silence and scarcely heard what the customers asked for. The servants thought her dreadfully dull; it was fortunate that Bertha was there, otherwise they would all have gone away.

Yes, if Mrs. Reschke had not had her! She was the guardian angel now; always on the alert, always pleasant, she always knew how to say just what the people liked to hear.

She had not found a place yet, had been at the Reschkes' for six weeks, but she would rather wait still longer than take something that did not suit her. She had often been about a situation, but had always come back with a long face. Where they would have taken her she did not like it, and where she was pleased the

character Mrs. Selinger had given her put off the lady. Bertha might cast down her eyes ever so sorrowfully, and in a trembling voice declare she had been unjustly treated, the envious cook had blackened her, the "dishonest" remained. It stamped the book in which her character was written.

At first Bertha had not troubled herself at all about it, she was glad to be able to rest a little after all the "drudgery," as she called it; she got as plump as a partridge from the many sweets which she devoured in the shop. But by degrees she became restless, even anxious. Would it really be so difficult to find another place? She began, too, to get tired of the cellar, now that she could no longer go out with Gertrude and enjoy herself.

Gertrude was strictly guarded by her mother now. Well-meaning souls had informed Mr. Reschke that Mr. Ladewig had declared he had been very much in love with Gertrude, but it was impossible in his position to be engaged to a girl who flirted with everybody, went out of an evening with strange gentlemen—no, "was about the streets" with strange gentlemen he had said! What would they think of it in Kottbus.

However much Gertrude defended herself and put on an air of offended innocence (when her mother boxed her ears), however much Mrs. Reschke at the bottom of her heart was convinced that nothing but envy and malice had put an end to the engagement, she now watched over her daughter. With inexorable severity she insisted on Gertrude's coming straight home from business; woe to her if she only stayed out a moment to get a little fresh air! Then it rained abuse, and reproaches, and blows. She made Ella a spy upon her, and the child saw something where there was nothing to be seen, and betrayed her sister for a handful of barley-sugar.

Gertrude drooped like a plant that has been transplanted from rich earth into a pot of sand. In the evening, after business hours, she sat, pale and listless, at home, at the table covered with a torn dinner-napkin, and bent low over some fancy work. She was handy with her needle, and so her mother had at once got a white frock for Ella which she was to embroider profusely. And she was also to make trimming for the underlinen of her own outfit.

In her heart Mrs. Reschke still hoped—perhaps Ladewig would put in an appearance again! And so she hoped for two fugitives.

Gertrude often let her work drop on her lap with a despairing sigh, stamped her foot, and then her eyes, with a passionate gleam in them, wandered up and down the gloomy walls. Outside it was spring, a warm, glorious spring. There was music in the Zelten. Couples went for a walk in the Tiergarten, and she had to sit in the dark cellar! She raised her arms, like an imprisoned bird trying the strength of its wings. In a cage! Even on Sunday!

The Sunday was spoilt for Bertha too; she had counted so on Gertrude, for most of her friends had moved, the first of April had scattered them to the four winds. They had gone to Moabit, to Pankow, goodness knows where, and were not to be got at!

Proud Augusta had left the lawyer's suddenly, it was whispered she had joined with the butcher to cheat her mistress. The anæmic young Mary had had to marry all in a hurry—a widower, too, with three children. Pale Minnie from Dr. Ehrlich's was in the hospital again.

There was nothing going on in the neighbourhood. And so she was glad when at last, on the first of June, the situation of cook, lady's maid, and duenna (all in one) offered itself at a Miss Schmettana's, a handsome young lady, whose silk skirts rustled, and who, as she said, was waiting for an engagement. The wages were not particularly high, but there would be many tips. And first and foremost Bertha was anxious to get into quite another quarter, into the Friedrichstadt, out of the neighbourhood of which she was thoroughly sick.

Mrs. Reschke, who was alarmed by the distance, was much against it; an actress was nobody, it would prevent her getting a place in a good family afterwards, and so on. But Bertha said, "Don't care a hang!" If she could only get away! From here she must always go along the Potsdamerstrasse, and she could not pass the Selingers' house without the blood rushing to her head, and having a bitter taste in her mouth. Then she clenched her fist in the folds of her dress—the old woman *had* served her out.

The last Sunday in May Bertha did not know what to do with

herself; it rained and she had no money at all—she was drained dry. And so she went to see Mina.

She had a long search before she found the right house; out here they all seemed like one happy family! Nobody knew where Matilda lived; her surname she did not know.

“Matilda? Matilda’s her name?” Some men, who stood in a great doorway in their shirt-sleeves and smoked, said, laughing, “How can one remember all the girls?”

Rude fellows! Only workmen! Bertha turned up her nose.

At last children who were playing in the court, in spite of the rain, showed her the way.

Holding out her dripping umbrella before her like a spear, she went up the many flights; although the house was new, the stairs were already worn by the innumerable hurrying feet.

On the fourth floor she stood for a moment to take breath—thank goodness, she was no longer accustomed to climb so high! She knocked at random at one of the many doors.

“Come in.” That was Mina’s voice.

Right, there she sat at the window knitting! Matilda crouched opposite to her on a basket with a lid, her elbows on her knees, her head between her hands, looking dreamily at her pot of myrtle; she could not have heard the knock and Mina’s “Come in.” Now she started and uttered a low cry: “Lor’, I thought—— Oh, it’s you, miss!”

Mina showed unaffected pleasure at Bertha’s appearance. “It’s really kind of ye to come an’ see me! Sit down, Bertha!” She pressed her friend down on the chair, took the wet umbrella from her and carefully wiped the drops from her dress. “Yer mus’n’t spoil it!”

“Let it be,” said Bertha, stopping her, “it won’t hurt! Ain’t my best by a long way.”

“Well, then, I’ll see about making coffee,” said Matilda. “My dear, you’ll drink a cup?”

“I’ll take the liberty.” Bertha observed critically how few berries Matilda took; but all the more chicory. What sort of coffee would that be! With a compassionate, contemptuous smile she looked round—how miserably poor it was here! Terrible to have to live like this!

Mina caught the look, but interpreted it differently. "It's fine here, ain't it? I can't tell ye how I feel, as if I were in heaven. I've not been so well off a long time. So quiet. It's such a rest. If only there wasn't that one thing!"

"Will it soon be?" questioned Bertha. "Now, now, yer mus'n't take it so to heart! Should ha' thought o' that before!"

"It ain't that, it ain't that," said Mina sorrowfully, and hid her face with her hand.

"Now she's crying again, the stupid lass," murmured Matilda, "an' she do know it certain—the little book says true—they'll meet again. But yer must believe. If yer don't believe, it don't come to pass."

"I don't believe it," wailed Mina. "Didn't I write to him, at once, the first day, he should come an' see me. An' I gave the address! An' then I wrote another letter! An' he hasn't come. Hasn't even written! An' he knows how it is with me!"

"Oh," consoled Matilda, "he'll come! But how can ye be so impatient—a few weeks? Who knows what constellations there are—up there——" She made a vague movement with her hand. "There's a stone in his way. He can't get over it. But he'll come. He'll come as certain as the world'll come to an end when the seven plagues are over. We've got one now: the influenza!"

Bertha laughed, "Nonsense!"

Matilda opened her dreamy eyes wide. "But no! Yer mus'n't say such things! If you knew everything that's in store for ye! I tell ye, yer wouldn't laugh any more."

She was so serious, spoke so solemnly that Bertha left off laughing. A slight shudder passed over her. What was in store for her? She hoped something very good! The woman was half mad! Resolutely she shook off the feeling of oppression, and when she saw that Mina was still weeping she whispered curiously to Matilda, blinking all the time at Mina, "Who is it then? Do tell me!"

"No!" Mina started up and hastily put her hand on Matilda's mouth. "Don't say! No, no, nobody shall know, they shan't blame him! No, no! I won't have it, I won't have it!" She had got very red and was almost in a passion.

Bertha was offended. "It's not nice of ye that you keeps a secret from your friend!"

Mina was already pacified, she took Bertha's hand. "Ye mus'n't take it ill, Bertha dear, but when I think they'd talk about him, I'm so sorry. No, no! it can't be altered. I've got to suffer for't. I don't think no more about it. I don't think at all. I just rest."

"But yer can't go on dreamin' like this," cried Bertha. "What are ye thinking of, the first child's no joke! My mother always says 'the second's nothing to speak of in comparison'—but who believes that? Have ye looked for a place to go to?"

"I——? Can't I stop here, then?" Mina looked round helplessly. "Oh, it won't be so bad!"

"What d'you know about it! We've had more than one girl with us for her first child. It's what mother makes most by. Haven't ye read about 'em in the paper? There'll be such places here. Yer must only inquire. When yer can pay enough, they provides for the child. An' poor girls has it cheaper: if ye does the housework for six weeks before, then they keeps ye for nothin' for nine days; it may only be seven, but I don't know for sure. P'r'aps you'll have to pay something, but only a very little. An' the birth ain't registered in yer parish at home!"

"Would it be otherwise?"

"O' course! What are ye thinkin' of? Like a shot!"

Mina shuddered. Her face became pale as death and then burning red. She clasped Bertha's arm convulsively. "It 'ud be registered at home, did yer say? An' there, nobody 'ud know anything about it? Not really? Do tell me!"

"No."

Mina made a movement as if she would get up and run off at once. "I'll go there—yes, I'll go there!" She looked round wildly. "If they only don't know it at home! I'll have to set off again. An' I was so happy here!" Her voice broke, she threw her apron over her head.

Bertha felt pity for her, but she was very stupid!

She promised to look after such a place the next day when she was still at liberty.

That calmed Mina. And even when it seemed inevitable that

she must go to strangers again, and the thought caused her a dull, almost physical pain, she still drank her coffee. And drank it with enjoyment.

By degrees she became quite cheerful. They sat so cosily round the table; Bertha on the chair, Mina and Matilda on the basket. A soft grey mild light of spring shone in on them through the thin little window-curtain. The rain, dropping from the eaves, was a monotonous, gentle melody.

Bertha, who had a clear voice, began to hum. Mina, who already at school had made a good contralto, would not be left behind. "Let's sing somethin'!"

But everything that Bertha proposed was Berlin sing-song, and Mina shook her head. She only knew the songs they sang at home, her brothers and sisters on the doorstep in the evening, the boys and girls when they walked in a long row along the high road on holidays.

She began at the top of her voice—

"Why stand the soldiers in rank and file?  
Why hurry the people with gestures wild?  
The captain looks with gloomy eye  
On the young deserter who's there to die."

It had always been her favourite song; Bertha, too, could not resist and joined in. Drawn out and resounding they sang it through—

"I go to death, I knew I must,  
Farewell, my brothers, here's my breast!  
Mutely the sign the captain gave—  
Oh youthful heart, so lowly laid!"

And other songs followed in which Matilda joined. "In the deep glades of the Forest," "Far to the South in Sunny Spain," "When the Swallows homeward fly," "Every eve, before my eyes I close," "Will she not come again, when All Saints' Day is here?"

They could not have enough; they began over and over again. Their loud shrill singing filled the little room and was heard far down the stairs.

It was a feast of memory they were celebrating, every new



melody excited them more and more. They had all sung them before they had come to Berlin ; they had sounded on the village street in the quiet night 'under the broad star-strewn canopy of heaven.

Bertha tilted her chair back, and, with her arms crossed on her breast, a brilliant colour on her young cheeks, sang with all her might.

Matilda, her elbows on the table, her head on her hands, hummed with them, rocking herself backwards and forwards continually.

Mina sat quite still and looked down on her lap. She was deeply affected when they finished with—

“See the flowers on the meadow  
Trembling in the breeze of eve,  
And my heart is sad and weary,  
And your love you thus can leave?”

Involuntarily her voice quavered at—

“Oh stay with me for ever and aye,  
My heart's been thy home for many a day.”

Mina had never enjoyed herself so much. Bertha, too, was gay, excitably so. She gave Matilda no peace till she had brought out her “little book” which she kept wrapped up in a lace-edged handkerchief—her wedding handkerchief—together with the book containing her characters, different gay-coloured New Year's cards, and a few yellowed letters.

She had no great wish to consult the book—“It's no laughing matter,” she said, and looked at Bertha distrustfully.

She put on the most serious face. “Do, do,” she begged. “Ask for me ! Shall I get money ? Twenty thousand pounds ? Cake every day ? A castle, fine clothes ? What else ?”

Matilda motioned her away angrily. “This book doesn't say such things. You wait. But I tell ye at once yer would hear it.” She raised her finger warningly.

Now she began the preparations. The rainy evening had closed in early, she hung her shawl before the window, and it was quite dark. She put two candles, stuck in bottles, on the table,

laid the book in the middle, and stood before it, her eyes devoutly raised.

When Bertha wanted to ask her something she put her finger on her lips. "Hush!" An enraptured, absent expression was on her face.

Now she whispered mysteriously, "Think of what yer'd like to have—go on thinking—more an' more! Now I'll ask."

Bertha kept quite still when Matilda took a hairpin out of her plaits. She did not dare laugh now.

"Go on thinking—go on—now!"

Matilda stuck the hairpin at random between the pages of the book, and then she opened it at the page touched. She read solemnly—

"Brittle as glass, can happiness last!

"An honest but poor man (honest but poor girl) loves you. Do not repulse him (her) to follow the rolling wheel of fickle Fortune. In his (her) arms you will be protected from adversity."

"Never heard such a thing!" Bertha was angry. "That stupid old Peters must be meant. I don't want to know anythin' about him!"

"Then you haven't thought right," said Matilda, shrugging her shoulders. "My little book says true. Will yer hear it again? But think properly!"

Again the pin dropped between the pages. Bertha watched, her hand resting on the top of the table, and bending forward. What would be her fate? She was very curious now.

"Ye see," triumphed Matilda, "now it'll be right." And she read—

"The sun of happiness smiles upon you, all your wishes will be fulfilled. But beware of the dark man (dark woman). Avoid him (her), he (she) might be your ruin. There is another stone in your way, but do not despair! Remove it boldly, and a life full of joy and the highest happiness awaits you."

"A black man?" reflected Bertha. "Who can that be? I wonder if Leo is meant?"

"Can be a woman?" said Matilda, and closed the book.

But Bertha was not satisfied, she went on tormenting Matilda and asked curiously about this one and that one. At last about

Arthur Reschke too. "Do ask, Matilda: What's Arthur doing?"

Mina, who till now had been sitting quiet and listless on the basket, raised her head. "What d'ye want with Arthur?" she asked.

Bertha laughed. "I, nothing. Would only like to know where the fellow is now! Ask away, Matilda!"

"Where—Arthur—is?" Mina had got up and stared at Bertha with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, Arthur! The old woman is getting quite dotty over it. Didn't ye know that he made off the beginning o' April! Oh no, you knows nothin', you mayn't show yerself in the cellar now—the paragon, haha!"

"But Arthur—where—where is he?"

"Gone! Marched off one fine day!"

Mina uttered a trembling sigh.

"An' took the till with him! Cleaned it out. The old woman don't speak about it, but Ella told me. The whole till, near five pounds! Haha!"

"Stol—en?"

That was a piercing shriek. Matilda sprang up frightened, Mina was deathly pale and swayed. She sat down heavily on the basket. Her lips had become quite white. Now she said trembling, "Ye did give me a fright," and threw Matilda a look which implored her to keep silence.

Bertha rattled on: "Nice doings! But you're real good-natured, Mina! Your relations ain't so kind to you, goodness knows. An' the fellow's not worth nothin'!"

"I'm so sorry for aunt," whispered Mina, and let her head drop on her breast. She sat silent and listened to what Bertha related. With zest, and in glaring colours, she painted the grief of the Reschkes, the fate of the prodigal son.

It was a relief for Mina when Bertha took leave. She gave her her hand listlessly; only when she had reached the door she called after her, "Bertha, don't forget! Yer knows, to ask about the woman for me! For God's sake do it!"

"Yes, yes!" Bertha nodded and smiled.

And Mina nodded and smiled back. She managed to keep up

till the door had closed behind Bertha, then she tottered to the bed, threw herself down heavily and buried her face in the pillow. Stolen? It had frightened her to death. . . .

Bertha came home in a very good humour. "All your wishes will be fulfilled, the sun of happiness smiles on you"—that was something! Humming gaily, she was just going to slip in through the doorway when she ran against a lady. She had appeared suddenly and noiselessly, like a dark shadow. A reproving glance fell upon Bertha.

That was a long, thin bag of bones! Bertha rubbed her round shoulder on which she still felt the knock the other had given her.

Down in the cellar she heard it was Miss Abercorn, the rich lady from the second floor, who was very religious and very charitable. "But stingy too," said Mrs. Reschke. "She don't often come to us; I don't know wot she lives on! Ain't got a girl either. When she do come it's allus when it's gettin' dark, an' then she buys carrots for a halfpenny an' packs 'em into her shabby old leather bag!"

The whole night Bertha dreamed of Miss Abercorn's reproving look, and her old, black leather bag.

Mina, too, dreamed, wild terrifying dreams, out of which she awoke with a start.

It was near dawn, a pale ray fell upon her bed, the sky was getting lighter. She felt very bad. Driven by a tormenting disquiet she got up, stumbled barefoot to her basket and collected the most necessary things—she must have everything ready when she had to go to such a woman! She felt that something stupendous was preparing in her. A dreadful fit of shivering drove her back to bed. There she crouched, half sitting, in a cold perspiration, her knees drawn up convulsively, her elbows pressed against her sides, her mouth contorted. When the sun came she woke Matilda, who was sleeping quietly by her.

A sunny day had dawned, the last of May, so warm, so golden, it seemed as if the summer were already there in its maturity and luxuriance. It became oppressively hot. The wild acacias on Tempelhofer Field which had been in bud in the morning were in blossom at noon.

When the sun at last declined and a refreshing breeze tempered the sultry heat of the day, a thin, grievous little voice was heard up in Matilda's room—the first cry!

It was a girl.

## XXII

MINA had found the place through the registry office in the Jägerstrasse. Mr. Miller himself had engaged her. In his rather shabby overcoat and well-brushed top-hat he had wandered restlessly through the crowded waiting-rooms of the registry office. Among all the girls and women who squeezed and pushed one another and pressed forward he had picked her out. She stood timidly in a corner clutching the little book containing her written characters. He had looked at them while she nervously pulled at her apron—they were not exactly brilliant! But he had not moved an eyelid. When means are small, no great pretensions can be made, especially when there are five children at home. He had watched her with secret misgivings—would she undertake it? He concealed the fact that the youngest was only a week old.

With secret misgivings she had ventured a shy glance at him—would he take her? In spite of the characters? If he took exception to them, where should she find a place? And she *must* have a place! All the blood left her face, she trembled and could hardly stand, her feet were still weak from her confinement and swollen from the exertion of walking and long standing.

A load fell from her heart when he said, "I will give you nine pounds a year!" She drew a deep breath.

As she did not speak immediately he thought she was hesitating, that nine pounds was not enough, and so he added hastily, "Ten! But that is the utmost."

They were both glad that they had found one another. Mina willingly paid her last shilling at the desk, and then looked with happy eyes and as if it were a handsome gift at the three shillings

which Mr. Miller took out of a thin purse and presented to her as a pledge of her engagement.

And so Mina had now been more than a year in the Millers' house. Pale Mrs. Miller, who was tormented by a perpetual cough, had never had such a good-natured girl. Mina was in her element here; from the first hour when with heavy tread and shoes creaking, she had gone to the bedside of the sick woman and taken the crying child from her weak arms, till to-day when she still washed baby clothes, unwearying as ever.

Mr. Miller had known better days; of good family he had had a business of his own, it was not his fault that it had gone downhill. He had been unlucky, and in spite of all his industry his losses could not be repaired. Practical people said reprovingly that he was incredibly trustful, and this paralyzed his ability. And then five children, coming one after another, and a sickly wife! He ought to be happy to have found a place in the Statistics Office.

The Millers' flat was small, on the ground-floor, in a so-called garden-house of the Eisenacherstrasse; always rather dark and a little damp.

In the largest room, which was divided into two by a curtain—they took their meals in one part—Mrs. Miller and the two eldest children slept. Mr. Miller's bed stood in the corridor in a sort of dark cupboard. In a little room next to the kitchen Mina slept with the two youngest. Then they had the drawing-room, the furniture upholstered in pale blue; it was a sanctuary.

Mina had by degrees risen to a certain authority; the children clung to her like burrs, and yet feared a blow from her work-hardened hand, such as she often gave them, instead of their weak mother. Here in the toilsome monotony of a straitened household Mina had developed; not to a flower that thrives in air and sun, but to a hardy tenacious plant that bears heat and cold equally well, growing behind walls on the smallest spot of earth.

When Mina looked in the glass on her Sunday out, she always felt a certain surprise that she was only twenty-five. She had so many lines on her forehead. Her back was broad, her hips big. With some trouble she had let out all her old dresses, for she had

no money now to buy new. Only her best black dress, in which she had once spent a blissful Sunday, was unchanged. She was allowed to hang it in her mistress's wardrobe, it would have become mildewed on the walls of her own little room. She only took it out occasionally to beat it, on account of the moths. It was too good to wear on Sundays when she went to the Park with all the children and the perambulator. And on her free Sunday when she sat in Matilda's room and rocked her child on her lap the old Golmütz blue dress did well enough, the body having been let out and mended under the arms with dark patches; it did not matter if it did get wet occasionally.

Mina's little Frida—Matilda's "bridegroom" was called Frederic, hence the name—was a lively child, and when you said "Frida! Frida! Frida!" and tweaked her under the chin with two fingers she squeaked with pleasure. She had been able to laugh for a long time. And how fat she was! Her cheeks were quite baggy. Much fatter than the Millers' little Irma; and was only a fortnight older.

Mina always compared the two children to herself. And then she did not know if she ought to be so glad that her Frida was fatter than Irma; she loved both. Frida was cleverer too. It was surprising; for while she occupied herself with Irma day and night, played with her, talked and sang to her, Frida lay alone on her pillow in the locked room the whole morning.

Matilda had had to make up her mind to go out charing half the day; what Mina gave, and she gave everything she earned, was not enough for two.

To-day Mina brought her month's wages with her; on these occasions she went with particular pleasure. She could not resist buying half a pound of coffee for Matilda and a cake for her child on the way. As the shops were shut on Sunday afternoon the grocer and the baker let her in at the back.

Then she ran to the Colonnenstrasse with her treasures. It was not so far, not quite three-quarters of an hour to walk, but to-day it seemed endless. She was so joyfully impatient, so excited. It was a fortnight since she had seen her little girl! She already began to know her, to be pleased when she came.

She hurried along with winged feet. How the people were streaming out of the town! Old and young, all smartly dressed. A little girl in a white frock, with fair, wavy hair, reminded her of Ella, and then she thought of the Reschkes and Arthur. How was he getting on? "Well," she hoped. Had he found his way back home again? And if he had and she were to meet him some day—but that was all so long ago now; past and over.

A cook and her sweetheart—quite a young fellow—passed her; they were hurrying towards Wilmersdorf. Then she thought, without especial agitation, of that Sunday when she had wandered out there into the fields with Arthur. How the time slipped away! That was two years ago now.

And her thoughts glided back into the present. Everything that had been lay like a dream behind her, joy as well as sorrow. She hardly remembered now what it was that had grieved her so much. And why think about it? There was enough to think of; so much to think of for the morrow every coming day, so many important considerations. Mr. Miller said this, Mrs. Miller that, the children wanted something else. Now she must cook, now scour, and now wash, now take out the children, and now clean boots, now fetch up fuel, and now—goodness knows what. There was no time left to think over what once had been and could not now be changed.

At last she was there. With a bright face Mina hastened up the stairs. On the second floor she thought she could hear Frida's voice; how happily the little thing crowed! But she was mistaken; when she stopped on the fourth floor to recover her breath from the rapid climbing before going in she heard a whimpering.

Frida was crying? She opened the door quickly, without knocking.

Matilda was bending over the bed hushing the child. Now she looked up. "Hush!" She laid her finger on her lips and whispered with wide-open eyes, "It's ill, I do believe it's convulsions!"

The bag of coffee and the cake fell from Mina's hand; she went forward quickly.

The baby lay in the big bed, almost disappearing between the



pillows in their heavy blue-red checked covers. Its mouth was open, the eyes too, but they were glazed and did not see the mother.

"Frida! Frida!" She called to the child and shook it; then she picked up the cake and held it close to its face: "Look, Frida, look!" She put it to its lips: "Bite a bit, Frida, bite a bit!" But the little tongue did not move; the clenched hands, with the thumbs turned in, were not stretched out.

"She's ill," said Matilda in her gentle voice. "So was mine too, 'fore it died; only it was smaller."

"Good Lord," whispered Mina; she could not speak loudly, her voice failed. "How long has she been ill?" She sank on her knees before the bed.

"About a week. Always different, sometimes better, sometimes worse. She's cuttin' her teeth. For hours she'll be quite lively, an' crawl about on the floor. At dinner she drank some o' my coffee, and pecked at my sausage an' bread. An' now she's bad again. Yes, yes, children are soon cut off, as if they were nothin'!"

Mina did not say a word; she lifted the sick child out of bed and felt in her open mouth. Her work-roughened finger passed over the hot and swollen gums. With a moan the child tightened her lips, threw herself up and clenched her little twitching fists; her whole burning body twitched, her eyes were turned up.

Mina gave a deep sigh—ill! And she had so looked forward to seeing her Frida! In a sudden outburst of tenderness she pressed her child to her breast. As if she felt better there she left off moaning; the twitching ceased too, she lay quietly.

She carried her to the window, sat down on the chair by the pot of myrtle and carefully examined her limbs, feeling each one.

No, her Frida had not lost much flesh yet. The little stomach especially was quite fat. And the cheeks were still fat, even if they were a little pale. She pressed resounding kisses, right and left, on the puffy, bloated flesh, and as if these kisses had magic power, the rolling eyes of the child were arrested—she looked at her mother.

Now Mina began to weep. And with tears she stammered, "Frida, now smile at me! I'm with ye, Frida, yer mamma!"

The little mouth twisted ; she took it for a smile. Delighted, she danced the child on her arm.

Matilda came and brought a pillow. Mina rolled Frida in it, and held her on her lap, rocking her gently to and fro and humming till the tired eyes closed. The child slept. The mother did not dare utter a sound. She looked down steadfastly on the fat little face which was deathly pale, with deep shadows under the eyes and very pronounced blue veins on the temples and over the little snub nose.

Hours passed. The sun had long sent slanting rays over the pot of myrtle. Not a sound. Nobody in the court ; nobody on the stairs, the house was as silent as the grave ; every one was out of doors.

Matilda was lying down on the bed, her nights had been disturbed lately by the restlessness of the child ; but she did not sleep now. Gazing fixedly at the ceiling she dreamt with her eyes wide open, and yet listened with all her senses on the alert. He must soon come—soon, soon ! The book said so daily, again and again, as often as she asked.

“Matilda !” called Mina ; she did not hear. What with the stillness and looking so long at the child’s features the mother became anxious ; twilight had come and in the half light the pale face seemed still paler. She was relieved when Matilda at last came shuffling up to her.

“Hadn’t we better go wi’ her to the doctor ?” whispered Mina.

“Wi’ whom ?” Matilda’s thoughts were far away.

“Why, wi’ Frida !”

“No ! What do the doctor know ! I didn’t go to the doctor. The book knows better, I’ll ask.”

“Or to the hospital,” said Mina anxiously. “There it don’t cost nothing !”

“If it’s to live, it’ll live, an’ if it’s to die, it’ll die. You’ll not get the child back again from the hospital, they’ll keep it there.”

“No, no, then I’ll not go !” Mina pressed her child so closely to her that it awoke with a cry. But it was better, sat upright, stretched out its little, weak hands, and ate some of the cake its mother stuffed into its mouth.

Mina's attention was quite taken up with Frida. She laughed and played with the child, without really listening she let Matilda babble on. She was stranger than ever to-day; she had not even made coffee. She spoke incessantly of her Frederick, of her being married in black silk, of the wedding-carriage, and then of the grave in which her sister was buried. She pulled the door open at every noise made on the stairs by the returning neighbours, and started at every sound that came up to them from the court. She was garrulously gay, her manner had something of the importance of a child, and then again she was mysteriously grave.

The full moon was shining through the window when Mina remembered that she had to be home at ten. It was nearly that now. Oh dear, how little Irma would cry for her!

She put down the child hastily. "You'll write," she begged Matilda.

"If I've time," she said dreamily.

"If Frida keeps well ye needn't write at all, but if she's ill again, oh, you will write that minute, won't ye? Then I'll come. Else I'll only come in a fortnight. Yer'll not forget, Matilda, will ye? Matilda!" She shook the preoccupied woman.

"Yes, yes."

Mina rushed away. She had not even time to kiss Frida's fat cheeks!

And yet when she was almost at the bottom of the stairs, she lingered—should she turn back again? It had never been so hard for her to take leave.

She went home quite sadly. Her heart was so strangely heavy, like a weight in her bosom. Gaily chatting people, returning home from some amusement, brushed past her on the pavement; oh, how happily she had gone out to-day! She passed the back of her hand under her nose and then over her eyes. She had never thought that she could be so alarmed about the child!

In the Eisenacherstrasse they were longing for her return. As she had no key she had to stand and wait for some time till one of the people living in the house should chance to return and

open the door ; she could not afford threepence, the charge of the porter or watchman for doing so.

Little Irma had been fretful the whole afternoon ; she was teething and missed her nurse. Now she was screaming with all her might, although her father carried her up and down unweariedly. The little flat resounded with her cries, nobody could sleep, the bigger children were tossing about in their beds, and for want of something to do began to throw pillows at one another.

Poor Mrs. Miller was quite exhausted, she gave the late-comer a reproachful look.

Mr. Miller said good-naturedly, " Well, Mina, you have been enjoying yourself to-day ! " And then, with a gentle sigh, when the door had closed after the servant and the screaming child, he added, " Yes, such girls have a good time of it. "

There was no sleep for Mina that night. She had succeeded in getting Irma off to sleep by rocking her gently in her arms, but when she put her in the perambulator she woke again. It was no use giving her her tit to suck—she warmed her a bottle of milk, got some sugar-water for her, all of no use—Irma still screamed.

Her shrill cries rang through the silence of the night. She wanted to be wheeled up and down, again and again. Mina pushed the carriage backwards and forwards : at last when she had cramp in the calves of her legs from standing so long, she sat down on the edge of her bed, hooked one foot into the wheel, and moved the perambulator in this way. She tried to rest a little, but it was not possible, though her tired eyes closed and her head swayed towards her pillow.

Thoughts came that she had never known before and tormented her, thoughts of her little Frida. Was she asleep ? Or was she crying ? Would Matilda be good to her ? Yes, she would, but would she look after her ? And all at once Matilda seemed to her so strange, and what had not struck her when she was there struck her now. She was so dreadfully absent-minded. And suppose she went charing the whole morning with Frida like this and locked her in ? Mina broke out in a cold perspiration, she sat as if benumbed. " Oh, Frida, Frida ! "

Irma gave an angry cry, she wanted to be pushed up and down.

“Hush! Hush!” Mina went on wheeling the perambulator backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, till the grey morning peeped in through the cracks of the Venetian blinds.

She shivered, though she had put on a petticoat and the air in the little room next the kitchen was very oppressive. She tried every possible position, her back and one leg were quite stiff, her feet had gone to sleep, her arms were icy-cold. Then she took the child out of her perambulator, and holding her in her arm crept into bed. There she laid her down on her breast, and at last she was quieted. She felt about with her tiny hands, stretched her legs, nestled up to her, cooed her contentment, and was then quite still.

Mina was sensible of a warm, pleasant feeling in her limbs; the fears that had tormented her the whole night vanished. Closer and closer she pressed the sleeping child to her, and bent over her in self-forgetting devotion. It was her little Frida that she held in her arms.

And so sleep came to her, too, for a short hour.

### XXIII

THERE had always been enough work to do at the Millers', but there was more than ever now. The children fell ill, one after the other, of chicken-pox. It was nothing dangerous, they sat in their beds and played, but they were inclined to cry and wanted looking after. And the small flat made everything more difficult.

Mina scarcely had her clothes off, it was only possible for her to clean her kitchen and wash up late in the evening. In the morning early she had to be up again to bring the restless patients their breakfasts, and make the tumbled beds.

Mrs. Miller did all she could; but she was so weak, the children tyrannized over her incredibly if Mina were not there to prevent it.

“Sit down quiet in the drawing-room, Mrs. Miller, or you'll be

ill too.—Will ye be still?” Mina banged with her fist on the door of the room where the children were making a terrible noise. “I’ll teach ye!” And then she took her mistress by the sleeve and pushed her into the blue sanctuary. “Now go in there!”

She wore herself out; quick she would never be, everything with her took time. Dead tired she sank into her bed late at night, her eyes closed at once; and even if Irma kicked about and screamed, and she had to push the perambulator backwards and forwards or rock the child in her arms, she did it with shut eyes and half asleep. There was no time for thinking. She knew that Frida was well or else Matilda would have written.

In this way a fortnight passed, Mina’s Sunday had come. But though the children were well again, Mrs. Miller had taken to her bed thoroughly exhausted. Mr. Miller came into the kitchen with his careworn face. “Mina, I’m very sorry, you can’t go out to-day—you shall have your outing another time!”

“Very well,” she said. As it was she could not put on boots, her feet were too swollen; she had to go about in slippers.

But still she was sad when, at five o’clock, her usual time for starting, she sat in the kitchen, without having changed her dress, with Irma on her lap. The other children, whom their father had turned out of the room, were making a terrible noise round her with tin saucepan-lids, which they had fetched from the garret.

To-day she had rather more time, to-day she could not help thinking of Frida. It was fortunate that Matilda had not written—how could she have got away? Now they would be looking out for her in the Colonnenstrasse. She hoped Matilda would not forget the cake for Frida, even though she did not come. Mina pictured to herself the little white points, which were called teeth, nibbling at the cake. No, Irma had certainly not such fat cheeks! And she pressed a kiss on Irma’s cheek thinking the while of her fair, little girl in the Colonnenstrasse. She did not hear the noise of the other children at all; she was far away.

There was a knock at the back-door. Probably it was the girl from the family on the ground floor in front, come, as she had done the other day, to complain of the noise in the garden flat. “Hush, be quiet,” commanded Mina, and then opened the door.

A tall girl, in a washed-out skirt, stood on the threshold. Good-

ness gracious! Mina stared as if she saw a ghost. "Maggie! Maggie Reschke?" She asked it doubtfully; it was such a long time since she had seen Maggie.

Maggie stood timidly outside.

"Why, Maggie, where d'ye come from? Come in, do; yer may! How glad I am! I haven't seen yer for so long, Maggie, an' have often longed for you. How did ye find me out, Maggie?"

"He's back," whispered Maggie, hardly intelligible in her trembling desire to impart good news to the other. She was excited, and therefore spoke still more indistinctly; her lips twitched, she breathed quickly.

"What d'ye say? Who's there? Who is it?"

"Arthur."

"Oh, is he?" Mina's sudden curiosity was already satisfied. "He!" Well, then, everything was right.

Disappointed, Maggie looked at her cousin; she had hoped to bring her great happiness. For the sake of that she had missed the Salvation Army that afternoon. She had run, breathless, to the Colonnenstrasse; according to Bertha, Mina was said to be living there with Matilda, or to *have* lived there; alas! it was all so long ago. Her mother's threat: "If yer goes to that baggage, I'll break all the bones in yer body," would not have kept her from going to see Mina; but shame did, exceeding shame, which drove all the blood into her cheeks when she thought of her mother. What would Mina say about her? Abuse her, yes. And could she deny it? No, oh no! Maggie was old enough and clever enough too: her mother need not have screamed so loudly that she was heard through the whole cellar—she knew everything without that. And so she had not gone to Mina; she was ashamed. But to-day she was not ashamed, to-day she could bring her good news—Arthur was back!

In the Colonnenstrasse, to her great disappointment, she only found Matilda ready dressed to go out, and very grand, in bonnet and shawl, and black silk; she was just locking the door of her room. Maggie heard that Mina was no longer living here, but in the Eisenacherstrasse, with a family of the name of Miller; the number Matilda did not know.

Maggie had run from house to house and with embarrassed lisp

and hot blushes asked after a family named "Miller." At last she had found them ; and now Mina was not even glad !

"How big you've grown !" said Mina, and drew her into the kitchen. "There, sit down. Now tell me how ye found me."

Maggie said that Matilda, whom she had met just going out, had given her the address.

Mina was quite taken aback. "What, Matilda, did ye say, was going out? Didn't wait for me? An' in black silk? Alone? She hadn't Frida on her arm?" She took hold of Maggie roughly, "Where was Frida?"

"What Frida?"

"Why, my Frida, my little lass!"

"Ah." Maggie went dark red and looked down embarrassed.

"No, I didn't see her."

"Ah me!" Mina was quite unhappy. "So she goes away on Sunday afternoon, an' leaves Frida all alone. Didn't she say when she'd come back? Or where she were goin'? Or why she went?"

To all these questions Maggie could give no answer. "Arthur is back," she brought out once more with great exertion, and her pale eyes looked eagerly and inquiringly into Mina's face. No trace of joy was to be seen on it, no blush of shame brightened it, no twitching betrayed surprise ; the features remained perfectly still.

Maggie was deeply disappointed. She had not been able to sleep the whole night ; she had tossed about in joyful expectation in her bed on the kitchen table, in which her tears had so often flowed and before which she had so often knelt, in an ecstasy of prayer, petitioning for Arthur's salvation. Crouching on the top step in the dark, yesterday evening, she had recognized Arthur, who stole past her down into the cellar, and from that moment she had made up her mind ; Mina must know it at once. How glad she would be !

She could not understand Mina's behaviour now. Did she not love Arthur any more? And yet that evening, when she had sat hidden behind the great mangle in the darkness of the cellar, Mina had clung to Arthur's neck, sobbed bitterly, and called his name again and again.



Maggie folded her hands, and looked imploringly at her cousin.

Mina took no notice of her : she murmured to herself, "Where can Matilda have gone? An' Frida! An' I can't go an' look after her."

She walked about restlessly, shifted first one thing, then another, and at last took Irma on her lap again, and sat down on the kitchen table opposite Maggie. But they could not keep up a conversation ; they had become strangers.

"Are you confirmed?" asked Mina, in order to say something.

Maggie shook her head. "Costs money. Mother says, 'Humbug!'"

"But yer out o' school?"

"Yes."

"Are ye learnin' anything?"

Maggie nodded eagerly.

"Where, then?"

"At the—Salvation Army."

"Gracious, are ye still so crazy?" cried Mina, and clapped her hands. "Keep away from me wi' that foolery!"

Maggie smiled gently, almost compassionately ; a faint blush lit up her face. And then she got up, and gave Mina her hand. "Save your soul," she said more distinctly than she usually spoke. The tears came into her eyes.

"Yes, I know you're good." Mina kissed her. "Come an' see me again. I'll always be glad."

"Arthur's—back," said Maggie again, as Mina was going to close the door behind her, and turned round once more on the threshold. "Are ye angry with him?"

"No, why should I be? Good-bye, Maggie." And she shut the kitchen door.

Maggie crept slowly, very slowly through the streets, her thoughts troubled her. How was it that Mina was not glad that the father of her child had come back? Was that love? Could those whose souls were not saved love at all? Oh, the poor people who did not know what love is!

With ardent eyes she gazed at the sky as if searching there for Him who teaches what true love is. Her lips moved—

“Come to Jesus !  
Thou hast never  
Such friend and brother !”

A tremor ran through the delicate young frame with the flat breast.

“The rose in the valley, the bright morning star,  
They whisper of peace to the soul,”

rang in her ears, and her eyes grew misty with longing, her lips opened unconsciously to a sigh of desire.

In some public gardens near she saw two Salvation Army soldiers sitting on a bench, and joined them. All three soon raised their voices in a hymn quite unconcerned that a troop of laughing children gathered round them, and, before long, grown-up people, too, stopped and looked at them derisively.

Mina could have slept undisturbed for the first time to-night. There was unusual quiet in the little flat ; the convalescent children slept the deep sleep of childhood ; even Irma did not give a single plaint. And yet Mina could not sleep ; her eyes burned from staring so long into the empty darkness. She was angry with herself for not making use of this good opportunity ; why must she always think of Maggie, of Matilda, and—of Arthur ?

How unexpectedly Maggie had appeared ! Nearly a year and a half had passed since she had heard or seen anything of her. And now she had come all at once, and brought her news of Arthur ! No, there was something not quite right about it !

Mina had not lived so long with Matilda for nothing : a superstitious feeling crept over her ; she shuddered and drew the bed-clothes up under her chin. Maggie’s sudden appearance was “destiny,” as Matilda said.

Where could Matilda have been going ? A harrowing curiosity tormented Mina. In black silk ? Matilda never used to put on the black silk, it was her wedding-dress, hung on the wall sewn up in a sheet, ready for the happy day when Matilda would rustle up to the altar in it with a wreath of myrtle on her head. And now she had gone out in it, without more ado, on an ordinary Sunday ?

Mina racked her brains.

And Frida quite alone ? Might not something happen to the

child? She thought of all the ghastly stories she had ever heard: of children, locked up in a room, who had played with matches and set their beds on fire, or climbed on to the window-sill and fallen down. That Frida was too young for such tricks she quite forgot.

She broke out into a cold sweat, her lips trembled. Excitedly she threw herself from one side to the other. Her poor wits did not help her, her heart beat and beat and would not be quieted. Something was going to happen—or else would Maggie have appeared? The idea took possession of her, she could not lose it.

She looked longingly at the narrow gleam which fell through the cracks of the blinds. If it were only light! How she longed for dawn! the dawn she had often dreaded, when tired and sleepy.

Would it not be best to go to the Colonnenstrasse first thing in the morning, slip into the house as soon as the watchman opened it, and see for herself how things were? She would have no peace unless she did. And she would be back again before they got up here; she would only have just a moment's look.

Yes—she would look for herself!

This decision calmed her; she fell asleep. But in her dreams she saw the Reschkes' cellar, Bertha, Arthur—and Maggie, always Maggie! She stood on the threshold with a pale, grave face, and pointed upwards: the thin finger did not move. What did she say—what?

With a scream Mina awoke. Now she was quite certain that something was going to happen! The morning dawned.

She could not get into her clothes quickly enough. The key of the house-door she took from the nail in the hall. Nothing would stop her; she *must* go to the Colonnenstrasse.

She ran through the quiet streets as if somebody were behind her. Always at a gallop. No trams were running yet; some men going especially early to their work turned round laughing and looked after her. She was obliged to laugh herself—was she not a fool to run so? The fresh morning air cooled her hot eyelids, and her head felt lighter. At one time she had often gone into the fields as early as this, sickle in hand, to cut the dewy grass. Bright and golden, the sun had risen like a luminous disc, from behind the Sandberg.

Oh, that was so long ago! Now the sun stood behind the high rows of houses, and its rays touched the roofs shyly.

She raced on—Mina had not believed she could still run so fast. If she could no longer run like a one-year-old filly, she could still run as fast as Bess, the cow, which stood in her father's stable. Mina sighed and gasped for breath. Probably she would never see Bess again. They did not want to know anything more about her at home.

She galloped on.

She was in the High Street, the first tram came towards her—now she was at the corner of Colonnenstrasse.

Quicker and quicker.

The end house at last! The door was just being unlocked; in the courtyard she met workmen going to the factories.

Breathless, she stormed up the many flights. What a fright Matilda would get when she heard a knock at her door so early. She would be lying and sleeping, she had not to be at her place till half-past seven.

Knock, knock! Of course the door was locked. No answer. Mina knocked louder. There was no denying that she slept soundly.

"Matilda, Matilda!" Mina applied her fist to the door; wake her, she must!

"Matilda dear, Matilda! It's Mina!"

Listen! did not somebody move inside? Mina stood listening, with her head stretched forward. Nothing! Only the beating of her own heart.

An indescribable feeling of terror came over her—why did she not open the door?

"Matilda! Do open the door! I've no time. Matilda!"

Hark! A whimpering inside, the crying of a frightened child! But quite weak, quite feeble as if the little throat were hoarse with screaming.

"Frida!"

Mina threw herself against the door until it shook on its hinges. She peeped through the keyhole; the key was not in on the other side.

"Frida, Frida!"

Everything quiet.

Mina looked round her in despair; with mad violence she thundered on the door again.

“Matilda! Frida!”

“Now, then, ’ere’s a row! Wot’s the matter?” cried a voice, and the neighbour on the left-hand side put her head out of the door.

Then an old man appeared on the right; both were scantily dressed—the woman in a petticoat and dimity night-jacket, her hair put away under a dirty night-cap, the man in ragged trousers and a woollen shirt.

“Don’t be so frightened,” said the woman; “p’raps she’s asleep!”

“No, oh no! Matilda! Frida!”

“P’raps she won’t open the door,” volunteered the old man, and winked slyly. “Bailiff comes early sometimes.”

“No, oh no!” Mina almost wept. “Frida, Frida!”

She knocked with all her might.

“Then she ain’t come ’ome at all yesterday evenin’,” said the woman at last. Turning round she shouted inside the door of her lodging, “Alma! Alma, didn’t yer say yesterday, ‘Mother, old Matilda ’ave got ’erself up!’ Didn’t she go out, about four, in black silk?”

“That she did,” crowed a thin voice, and a young girl appeared in a short pale blue flannel petticoat; her bare feet in torn slippers. In her hand she held a big pair of curling-tongs. She stared curiously at Mina from under her bushy mane. “Oh, that’s the girl that’s got ’er kid wi’ Matilda! I say, your child ’ave screamed the ’ole night, as if it were bein’ killed!”

“Frida!” Mina turned as pale as death.

“Mr. Smith, you know where ’e lives, go round to the locksmith, that the woman can git at ’er child,” said the neighbour.

The old man trotted off good-naturedly.

“Mother,” said the young girl with the curling-tongs, “Bruno allus sings ‘Molly wi’ the tile loose’ when ’e meets ’er. She ’ave got a tile loose, that’s certain, an’ more’n one. Yer should ’ave seen ’er yesterday, a-goin’ off—’twere enough to make yer die o’ laughin’! She’d stuck a bunch o’ green on ’er dress in front!”

Various people were coming up-stairs now ; Mr. Smith had given the alarm. All at once everybody had something to report about Matilda. They grouped themselves round Mina.

“Miss,” said the jobbing tailor, who lived just opposite on the fifth floor, the other side of the court, “’ow could ye trust yer child to that person? I’ve often seen ’er standin’ at the winder in the evenin’ with the baby. An’ I thought every moment, ‘Now she’ll throw it down!’ She were quite off ’er ’ead day before yesterday ; she stood alone at the winder, stark naked in ’er shirt, an’ pulled all the green off ’er myrtle. An’ laughed the ’ole time.”

“Yer don’t say so !” The interest was now concentrated on the tailor.

“It’s all over with ’er,” he said in the same voice as he might say, “The trousers is ready.” “Yer can go an’ look for ’er ; she’s in the canal somewhere. I’ll go to the police station an’ report.”

“I saw ’er goin’ along the street yesterday afternoon,” screamed a woman. “I turned round an’ looked after ’er, ’cos she was so fine. She didn’t see me.”

“I met ’er too,” cried another. “She were a-talkin’ to ’erself the ’ole time. I think she said, ‘I’m comin’, I’m comin’!’ An’ then she laughed an’ chattered as if she were that ’appy.” A shudder ran through the group.

“Yer can call yerself lucky if you finds yer child alive,” the neighbour said kindly to Mina. “’Ow easily such a person can let a baby starve or do away with it. They don’t know wot they’re doin’ ’alf the time !”

Mina trembled all over ; again and again she rattled desperately at the door.

At last Mr. Smith came with the locksmith. The man could hardly work, the curious people crowded round him so. When the door sprang open, they almost fell into the room ; Mina was by no means in first. But she got to the bed before all the others, one stride brought her there.

Frida lay with open, terrified eyes. She was carefully tied into her bed with a strip of webbing, so could not have fallen out. The remains of a nibbled roll lay on the floor. The child’s eyes

were swollen from crying; the little throat was hoarse from screaming. She could not utter a sound. When she recognized her mother, she smiled faintly.

With a scream Mina caught at her Frida; she pressed innumerable kisses on the pale cheeks, on the damp hair. And all the time she laughed and wept with happiness. The lookers-on showed lively interest.

“A pretty lass!”

“Jolly little kid!”

“It ’ud be a pity, if anythin’ ’ad ’appened to ’er.”

Frida was admired by all.

The neighbour felt the baby’s leg with an air of experience; to do so she had pulled down the red and white striped socks. “A bit flabby, but well covered. Can she run? ’Ow old is she? Two, ain’t she?”

“Oh no, sixteen months,” said Mina, with a feeling of immense pride.

“Yer don’t say so! Well, ye can be proud of ’er.”

Every woman wanted to lift Frida to try how heavy she was. She was passed from arm to arm. Nobody thought of Matilda. Mina had forgotten her too, till the girl with the curling-tongs, who had been spying curiously about, bawled, “Well, I never; if she ain’t been an’ gone an’ stripped ’er myrtle, there ain’t a leaf on it, an’ I were goin’ to ask ’er for some on my wedding-day!”

“Leave the old myrtle alone,” screamed her mother. “Ain’t got nothing to do with you. Yer much too green to be thinkin’ o’ marryin’.”

“That’s done for,” said the tailor thoughtfully, and looked critically at the myrtle. “Well, she don’t want it no more; she’s in the river.” And nobody could reason him out of this conviction.

Mina, her child in her arm, pressed up to him, frightened. Was it really true that Matilda would not come back? Her eyes became large and fixed—what should she do with Frida? The blood went to her head in a hot wave. What was she to do? Good heavens, what would become of the child?

“Oh,” she stammered, dismayed, “where shall I leave Frida? I’m in service!” At the same time the thought struck her with

terror: she had been away too long. Mr. Miller would have to make his coffee himself!

“Oh dear, oh dear!” She looked round helplessly, in the greatest embarrassment.

“Haven’t yer any relations?” asked her neighbour.

“Oh yes—oh no—yes, yes, but——”

“Ah, I sees; yer don’t want to go to ’em.”

—Mina nodded and went dark red.

“I’ll tell ye wot—I ain’t without feelin’, an’ you’re in a pretty fix—give me the child. You’re not likely to find any one else. Nobody wants the trouble now-a-days. There ain’t nothing to earn over it, they eats too much; you’ve always got to be feedin’ sich kids. Sixpence a day won’t pay for it, but I’ll do it for you!”

The daughter with the curling-tongs wanted to object: little children cried so much, her night’s rest at least she would have undisturbed. But her mother screamed at her, “’Old yer tongue! We’ll soon make ’er quiet. I takes ’er!”

And without further ado she lifted the child from Mina’s arm and carried her across into her flat. Mina followed. As if Frida herself noticed the difference between Matilda’s poor, but clean room, and the wild confusion that received her here, she set up a hoarse, complaining cry.

Mina glanced round shyly. What did it look like! The beds not made, the floor had been spit upon, empty beer bottles in the corners, unwashed dishes and plates on the hearth, rags, instead of curtains, hanging at the windows. Everywhere dirt, dirt. Too many people in the two small rooms. A lodger was just getting up yawning, a young girl was blacking boots, a second lodger called for his coffee. The air was quite exhausted and full of smells of all kind.

Frida wailed, and Mina, who was uneasy, wanted to take her again, but the woman prevented it; she seemed offended. “Wot, yer thinks I can’t manage ’er? I can splendid if yer’ll only go. She’ll be all right when she don’t see ye. Wot, my ducky? Do ’e go!” She pushed Mina to the door.

Mina hardly ventured to say, “She’s thirsty, she wants her bottle!”



"Shall 'ave it, shall 'ave it, prime an' fine, Bolle's milk ! 'Ush—'ush—do 'e go now !"

And Mina, casting a last, sad look at her child, went ; she did not want to make the woman angry, she ought to be glad that she had taken the child off her hands.

She crept down the stairs crushed, she felt as if she could not leave the house, could not go out of the door, could not leave the street. But she had to. She must return to the Millers' ! How had they got on without her this morning ? Had they found the coffee and taken in the bag of rolls ? If it were left so long hanging at the back-door, it would certainly be stolen.

Involuntarily she hastened her steps.

Sixpence a day ! Only now she realized how much that was. Good heavens, she could never manage it ! A paralyzing fear took possession of her, she leant heavily against the brass bar of a shop-window, and gazed at the goods with blank, unseeing eyes. Then she began to count ; like a child she had all her fingers to help her. But, however much she counted and counted, sixpence a day, that made fifteen shillings a month, and she only got ten pounds for the whole year !

Her lips, which were murmuring the figures, became quite pale. The perspiration came out on her forehead. What was she to do ?

Anxiously she thought and thought. Where was she to get the money from ? Was there no one who could help her, who would give her enough to make up the sum ? Suddenly it flashed across her mind they had money of hers at home ! Had she not sent them twenty-six shillings to buy the new cow ? She did not want it back—oh no ! But they would take her child for it ; they had enough milk. Two cows ! Who would miss a little drop for Frida ? And she would send some money every month.

Her father had indeed written her a very angry letter when they got to hear about Frida at home. He had called her to account, had not left her a shred of reputation. And when she considered, wasn't he right ?

Mina thought of her parents without resentment. No, it was wrong of her that she had been obstinate and had not written any

more. It was more than a year now since they had heard anything of one another.

A sudden feeling of home-sickness came over Mina. Her eyes filled with tears, she pressed her hands together. Yes, she would go to them and say, "Forgive me!" Sixpence a day, who could pay that? And then the dirt! And would the woman be kind to Frida? She was a stranger; but her mother at home, was she not the child's own grandmother?

If she were to walk in unexpectedly, amongst those to whom she really belonged, she was sure they would no longer be angry. Then, too, they would be pleased with Frida; Frida was so pretty!

#### XXIV

NOT only the inmates of the last house in the Colonnenstrasse, but the whole neighbourhood, sedulously studied the *Lokalanzeiger* and all the local papers they could get at for the next month. "Would she come back or not? Would she be found or not?" was the general subject of conversation.

Matilda did not come back. She was not found either.

But her sister came, a portly, comely person who took temporary possession of the property of the missing woman. The neighbours looked on curiously while she packed the things together. Towards evening the husband came and helped his wife to carry away the box containing Matilda's outfit.

When Mina went to see her child on Sunday the cover of a book was sticking out of the neighbour's coal-box; she drew it out curiously from the coals, between which it was wedged. But she dropped it again hastily as if it burnt her fingers—it was Matilda's little book.

The Millers were rather in a dilemma; Mina had declared she must go home for a few days. She had not said why, but insisted on her demand with a strange obstinacy. And as Mrs. Miller felt fairly strong, the children were well, there happened to be no big wash on, and Mr. Miller was afraid of

osing their hard-working servant in case of a refusal, she got leave of absence for two days ; but only for two days.

Mr. Miller, too, paid her wages, which were not due till the first, a few days earlier, she begged so hard for them ; it was not easy for Mr. Miller to give her the money now ; he, too, always had difficulties with his finances.

Mina wanted every penny. The foster-mother threatened to put Frida into the street if she was not paid at least two-thirds of a month's payment. Mina had to owe the last quarter even though she had carried everything she could spare to the Grummachs' ! Evening after evening, with a small parcel under her shawl, she had stolen secretly to the old-clothes shop in the Göbenstrasse ; chemise after chemise had found its way there, all the good homespun linen which she had brought with her from the country. Presents, too, which she had now and again received from her employers, went the same way ; they were still new, she had always thought it a pity to use them. It was almost hardest for Mina to part with a cardboard box containing coloured soap and bottles of scent ; she held it irresolutely in her hand for a long time and looked at it with brimming eyes. Then she carried it away too.

It was a beautiful September morning when Mina, with Frida on her lap, wrapped up in a shawl, sat in the train that bore her to her home.

A feeling of joy began to stir in her, lively curiosity too—how would she find everything and everybody ? Now that she was so far on the way she had lost her fear. They must be glad to see her after such a long separation ! Even if she did not come home very grandly dressed, as she had once pictured to herself in bold dreams, her blue dress still looked respectable, and the brown straw hat which Mrs. Miller had left off wearing and given to her, her family did not know at all ; unhappily she had had to carry her beautiful hat trimmed with roses to the Grummachs', and had only got elevenpence for it.

Mina ate with appetite the ham sandwich Mrs. Miller had given her, and let Frida nibble at it too. Then she took a drink of coffee out of the beer-bottle wrapped up in newspaper, and let Frida drink some,

Her fellow-travellers took her for a married woman, and asked about her husband and if that was her youngest. Third-class passengers are not usually reserved with one another, but Mina was silent. She sat quite still, crowded up amongst the others, and looked at her child.

Oh, how pretty Frida was! A little pale certainly, the country air would do her good. The woman had always complained the "kid" was naughty and would not eat; she said she had had convulsions again, too, as once before, at Matilda's. She was no longer such a lively child. On her back she had sore places from lying so long without being changed, and the little hairs on the back of her head were quite rubbed off by the rough pillow from which nobody had ever taken her up. She could not be got to walk, her legs were a little crooked. With speaking she was backward too, she expressed her satisfaction or dissatisfaction only by crowing or grumbling. She had certainly gone back in the last weeks, but still she was a splendid child, a handsome child! Mina thought all eyes were upon her beautiful little girl.

She had made her as pretty as possible in a tartan cloak and a red woollen cap with lappets over the ears. The shawl she kept carefully over the mantle that it might not be soiled by crumbs or smuts.

At last they were at their station.

Ah, the river flowed along quite as it used to. Only the town seemed much smaller.

From the towers the bells rang noon. That was right; she would be home in good time! Home! Without waiting she walked on, out into the fields.

She stepped out briskly. A mild sun lay on the stubble, the wind carried along delicate white threads. It was more summer-like in Berlin; here there was a fresh breeze that blew through you. Everything was already stored away in the barns, only the cabbages still stood in stately rows, and the blackish green of the potatoes drooped above the ground, they must soon be ripe.

The country girl awoke in Mina. She turned off the path to the potatoes, and pulled up one of the plants to see how many tubers it had. Oh, how large and healthy they were! She rejoiced. And when there was a rustling in the turnips and a

partridge rose, and then a hare ran across the furrow—she laughed aloud with pleasure. When would Frida run after the hare, as she had done as a child in many a fruitless chase! A feeling of intense happiness, such as she had scarcely ever known, came over her.

The child, too, seemed satisfied, cooed with pleasure, and at last fell asleep, nestling her head on her mother's neck. Mina walked on with measured steps, so as not to awake Frida. Then she would have pink cheeks when she woke up and be very sweet, and the parents would be doubly pleased with her. The way did not seem at all long to Mina; formerly, when she had brought butter to the town, she had thought it longer, and then she had not had so much to carry as to-day.

At every step there was a memory. Here, in the hollow, she had seen the stork when leaving home, and Bertha had played all sorts of tricks and driven it away.

The nearer she came to Golmütz, the more vividly she thought of Bertha. She felt quite embarrassed: how would she meet Bertha's mother? She could tell her nothing, nothing at all about her daughter; she had seen Bertha for the last time the day before Frida was born. Since then she had neither heard from her nor seen her. It was wrong, unfriendly; not at all as if they were from the same village. But so it was in the great town—the many houses, many streets, and every one so busy with his own affairs.

By degrees Mina became excited. When she had reached the higher part of the road, and the slender, pointed spire of Golmütz church peeped over the Sandberg, her heart beat. The warm blood mounted into her cheeks.

There it was. And there was the village with its overhanging roofs, not shrouded in the morning mist as she had seen it when she left home, but clear and bright in the limpid afternoon light. She uttered a low cry of joy, and involuntarily stood still. At last she saw it again. Nothing, nothing was changed. Only where there had been barley were now potato fields; and there was a rotten stump, where the old wild pear-tree had once spread out its branches. Some of the pines on the Sandberg had been felled, and young trees planted.

She took in everything with loving eyes, and then, carefully wrapping up her sleeping child, ran down into the village. It was as if she had gone away yesterday! No, as if she had never gone away!

She lifted the latch of the green door, the upper half was always open to allow the poultry to fly in and out.

They all sat in the room at their evening meal, quite absorbed in their thick slices of bread thinly covered with plum jam; her father drank coffee with it. They looked up astonished, without recognizing her.

Mina stood at the threshold like a stranger. She was not able to speak; her lips trembled with emotion.

Then Emma, who was nearest the door, screamed loudly, "It's Mina!"

They all jumped up; only her father remained sitting. He did not say, "Good day," or "Sit down!"

Mina gave her mother her hand shyly—all at once she felt so oppressed, she did not know why; then she shook hands with her brothers and sisters. They were all there, Max, Cilla, Henry, Emma; only Mollie was missing. In her place was a plain young woman, who turned away when Mina looked at her questioningly and pulled at the large plaited apron which was intended to hide her figure.

"How are ye, mother?" asked Mina softly.

"Well!"

"An' you all?"

"We're well," replied Max for the brothers and sisters.

Then all was quiet; nobody spoke a word. A blue-bottle hummed about the room. The father looked straight in front of him and went on eating.

Now Emma asked curiously, pulling at her sister's shawl, "What have ye got there?"

In the same moment Frida gave a cry.

"My little lass," said Mina bravely, and threw back the shawl.

Again the same silence.

Mina looked round, she tried to catch her mother's eye—she was gazing on the ground,

The younger brothers and sisters stood open-mouthed.

Her father went on eating ; now he cut himself another slice of bread, and spread it.

The strange young woman had placed herself at the window with her back to the room.

"Where's Mollie?" said Mina, trying to speak familiarly and easily.

"She's well," said some one curtly.

"Where is she? That do trouble me not to see Mollie. She were always such a good girl. She'll be sorry too."

"Don't know about that," said Max, and a half-sarcastic, half-embarrassed smile played round his lips ; there was not much moustache or beard to be seen yet.

Then all was quiet again.

If they would only speak ! Mina's colour came and went. She would rather they had blustered and scolded ; anything would have been better than this icy silence. Involuntarily she pressed Frida closer to her, she must find a support in her child. She was so alone.

"Do speak !" she brought out at last, with a deep, trembling breath. "Speak, speak !" She could not stand this any longer. She would rather begin herself.

"Are ye angry wi' me, mother? Mother, look at me !"

"Sit down," said the mother, but still she did not look at her daughter.

Mina dropped heavily on to the nearest bench ; all at once she felt quite weak, dead tired, thankful that she could sit down. Her trembling hands no longer held the shawl together, it fell back, and Frida sat on her arm in her tartan cloak, and looked about with her round, blue eyes.

"Mother," said Mina, "ain't she a pretty little lass?"

The woman turned round, began to busy herself at the fire-place, and to rattle the pots and pans there.

"Father !"

"What's it got to do wi' me?" Barthel Heinze spat on to the floor. "The plums ain't good to-day, mother ; they're burnt—taste bitter."

"Father !" Mina leant forward over the table, and tried to

take his hand. "Father, don't be like that! Look at me! Speak to me!"

"I'm speaking to her," he said grudgingly. And then, after a pause, he began roughly: "Get yersel' back where yer comes from. There ain't nothing to be got here. Yer can go where you're so well off that ye squanders everything an' forgets yer father an' mother as has toiled an' moiled for ye. Be off wi' yer!"

"I ha' sent ye twenty-six shillings! I'd like to ha' sent more, if I'd had it," murmured Mina.

"Yer can talk, I knows about nothing."

"Yes, yes, Heinze," said her mother, and came nearer. "She did send once."

"Hold yer tongue," screamed her husband at her. "Is that worth talking about? Did we send the girl to Berlin for that? Others sends home quite different." And in the tone which Mina had feared as a child, he turned to her again: "What d'ye want?"

She turned red and pale, and stuttered.

"Now, then, what d'ye bring wi' yer?" He looked at her gloomily, and then his eyes fell upon Frida.

Heaven be praised, now he would be kinder! She lifted up Frida and held her towards him, as if she would say, "Look at her, admire her!"

"What's the brat doing here?" grumbled Heinze, and then he struck the table with his fist so that the bread-crumbs flew up like dust.

Mina felt as if she were being suffocated, she was in mortal terror, but it must come out, it must! She had come here for that purpose. She cleared her throat, and then said, her voice still hoarse: "I can't keep Frida in Berlin. She's too bad off there. Mother wouldn't have much work wi' her. An', Emma, you'd look arter her? Didn't I do it for you? An' all's so dear in Berlin!"

"We've got to pay for what we has here too."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Mina quickly. "But the good air don't cost nothing, nor the milk neither. You've got two cows—I helped ye to get the new one. An' then I thought—if ye—



that ye—I'll willingly give ye something for doing it—as much as I can—every month!" She looked at her father expectantly.

He remained silent.

"In time I'll get more wages, you'll see. Now I've only ten pounds a year!"

"That ain't true. You'll get more'n that!" The old man brought his fist down on the table again, and the brothers and sisters whispered together.

"Yes, yes, as true as I live, I only get ten pounds from the Millers! They haven't got much themselves."

"Yer ninny! What d'ye take such a place for?" screamed her father, and an angry flush mounted to his forehead. "There be enough rich folk in Berlin: why d'ye go to such beggars, where there ain't nothing to be got?"

Mina hung her head. "I was that glad to get the place: they're good people."

"Good people—good people—such wages is a crying shame! Did we bring up our children for that? Yer gawk! The other lasses are sharper; they gets fourteen, sixteen, eighteen pounds! They comes back like fine ladies, an' brings summat for their parents too. Look at Bertha Fiedler, what luck she's had!"

"Yes, yes," put in her mother quickly, "yer had the blue dress when yer was home. But that be true about Bertha! An' such a poor lass that couldn't lift a sack of potatoes on her back. An' you with yer big bones. I be that shamed. How angry I am Sundays when I see mother Fiedler in church, with a striped shawl—gold and yellow stripes—an' a petticoat with a silk flounce! Then she takes up her dress as high as she can. 'My Bertha has sent me this!' Bertha this an' Bertha that! The folk has something to look at; an' we must stan' by! It's hard!" She uttered a sigh.

Mina sighed too. She had nothing to give them. A disquieting feeling of uneasiness came over her. Everywhere eyes met her imploring eyes, but there was no sympathy in them, only curiosity.

She looked at Cilla. That tall, strapping girl stood with her lip hanging, like a cross child. "Where's my apron?" she sulked.

“Didn’t ye promise me one? An’ a lot o’ things besides! I can wait for ’em till I’m black. If I’d gone to Berlin, I’d ha’ done different.”

“Wha ha’ ye brought me,” said Emma suddenly, and pulled at her sister’s sleeve.

“An’ me?” cried Henry.

Mina drooped her head lower and lower, she felt so ashamed. She had brought nothing, nothing at all; not even something cheap for the children!

“Let be, Emma dear,” she whispered; “I’ve nothing now, I’ll send ye summat!”

The child smiled incredulously.

“Don’t ye be took in,” said Cilla bitterly; “she won’t send yer nothing.”

Henry and Emma began to cry loudly.

Max gave a short laugh.

“Quiet,” thundered the father, “An’ now, Mina, say what ye wants, an’ be quick about it. Hold yer tongues, yer others!”

Despair gave her courage. “I’ve told ye. Will yer take my lass, my little lass? I don’t know what to do wi’ her. Father, mother,”—she suppressed a sob, her voice trembled—“don’t let me beg in vain! Oh, do be kind! I——”

“No, no,” her father interrupted roughly. “We’ve enough mouths to feed. Take yer lass back where she came from.”

“But Heinze, didn’t ye hear? She’ll pay for her!”

“A fine lot that’ll be. With the few pence that she gets!”

“Oh, father, I’ll do better, I will. Mother, mother!” Mina ran to her mother, and pressed the child into her arms. “You’ll not miss it. Frida eats an’ drinks as much as a bird. You’ve got two cows an’ enough bread!” Her eyes fell on the meal on the table.

“If you’re hungry, eat,” said Heinze. “Yer shan’t say yer didn’t get any food. There’s bread. An’ here’s coffee!”

Mina shook her head vehemently. “I’ll not eat. Take my lass! Do ’e! She’s so dear! Take my lass!”

Frida, who did not feel at home on her grandmother’s arm, became restless. Hungry and frightened, she began to cry miserably.

"It's what I want, ain't it, to have a crying child about again?" grumbled the old man. "No, no, take yer lass back to Berlin."

And then, laying aside his seeming quiet, he suddenly yelled out, "D'ye think that were a joke when the postman brought me a letter wi' a big seal, an' in it there stood I were to go at once to Schwerin. I thought it were summat great: I'd won in the lottery, or Reschke, my brother-in-law in Berlin, were dead, an' had left us a bit o' money. I were that happy, same as when Max came back from the conscription; we couldn't ha' done without him at harvest! An' I go there, as fast I can; our young cow were going to calve for the first time, but I left everything as it was—an' then it were nothing but Mina had got a child, an' had made me guardian by order o' the court. Yer can if ye likes! But I ain't got nothing to do with the brat besides. D'ye hear, mother," he screamed to his wife, who was rocking the crying child on her arm, trying to soothe it, "put it down at once—ain't got nothing to do with you!"

Trembling, Mina took the child again.

And now he roared at his daughter: "What d'ye stand an' look at me like that for? Ain't I right? It's nothing to us. Did ye ask me? It ain't got no business here!" With this he sat down heavily on the bench, from which he had sprung up in his anger, reached for the bread and cut himself a thick slice.

A great silence in the room.

The mother furtively wiped her eyes with her apron, the brothers and sisters stood round frightened. No one ventured a word. Mina was silent too.

Slowly she moved to the door—what should she stay for? When she was on the threshold she looked back and saw that the strange young woman was now leaning confidently against Max. Who was she?

Then the door closed behind her; she was outside.

The cool air was like the touch of cold fingers on her burning face. But she could not collect her thoughts, it all felt like a dream. It could not be, it could not be, they must call her back—was she not at home!

In the darkest corner there was a ladder leading up to the loft,

she had often hidden there as a child ; now she cowered down on the lowest rung.

Her mother found her there. She had crept out after her ; she could not let her daughter go like this. She brought a little jug of warm milk for the child, and put a piece of stale cake from last fair-day into Mina's pocket. Mina took everything with mournful thanks ; the child drank greedily, in long, thirsty draughts.

Her mother wept. "I'm so sorry, Mina, that yer goes away like this ! But Heinze is that mad. An' to think it should happen so ! Oh dear, oh dear ! Didn't I say, 'Don't forget yer church !' It 'ud all have been different then !"

"Don't forget yer church, an' send home all ye can"—yes, they had said that ! Mina remembered quite well. She shuddered, and got up heavily. "Who is it in there ?" she asked, and pointed to the door of the room.

Her mother's face brightened. "D'ye mean the young lass ? That's Lizzie who's to marry Max. A handsome girl, a nice girl ! An' a tidy bit o' money. Max has luck. Father's building on a room for 'em. The wedding is at Michaelmas. You'll ha' noticed—it must be soon."

"Yes," said Mina faintly. And then she went out of the house abruptly, without saying good-bye, without giving her hand to her mother.

When she was outside she did not look back—she had lost her home.

## XXV

AN autumnal wind blew. A drizzling rain fell fine and penetrating. The shades of evening already began to hide the distance. On the bare field, to the left, the wailing call of a plover was heard, a second answered from the right.

The solitary wanderer had long left the village behind. Her tears did not flow, she swallowed them all down, but inside they burnt. Her face remained stony.

Unmindful of where she was going, she crossed the high road

and wandered on and on—a stranger and alone. But no, not alone, had she not her child? She kissed the child's cheeks, which were damp from the rain. And yet—suppose there were no child? . . .

Mina had never had this thought before, but now it rose in her mind, suddenly, peremptorily. Suppose she had not got Frida? The child's weight suddenly became too heavy for her arms; she dropped down on a heap of stones by the side of the road, drew the shawl round herself and Frida and sat motionless.

The wind blew round her, lifted the shawl again and again, and tugged at the tartan cloak. Let it blow, damp and chill! Everything was over. A numbing sadness had taken possession of Mina, a paralyzing helplessness. She did not know what to do.

Only now she realized how much she had depended upon her parents taking Frida. All hope was gone, terrible wretchedness around her, the sky overcast, not one ray of light—everything dark.

Other girls had had children—Mina knew more than half-a-dozen of them—what did they do? And it was whispered of one in the village that she had made away with her new-born child. But nobody could prove it; she had a well-to-do peasant now as a husband and was in good circumstances.

Only she, she alone did not know what to do. No help. She groaned and muttered gloomily to herself. Letting go her hold of the child she threw up her arms with a despairing gesture and stretched them into the air.

Where could she go—where could she go?

“Take the lass back where yer brought her from,” her father had said. Mina shuddered when she thought of the room in the Colonnenstrasse, of the bad air, the strange woman, the dirt. And her little lass should pine away there? Would it not be a thousand times better she were dead?

Dead—dead! The thought took possession of her. A continual trembling ran through her body—how could she think of such a thing!

She pressed the child to her, and yet had no love for it at that moment. Her heart was dead. It lay in her breast like a cold, hard stone. She was not angry with her family either; father,

mother, brothers and sisters, they were *called* so, but they *were* not. All at once they were as remote and as far away to her as the greatest strangers.

Her need was too great ; she felt nothing more.

She did not notice that Frida whimpered softly with discomfort. The red cap with the lappets was pushed on one side, the tartan cloak blown out by the wind and the little legs bare, a shoe was lost too. Mina saw nothing. Mechanically she got up, mechanically she walked on.

Her dress dragged through the wet ; sand and clay clung to it. Without purpose, without aim she ran into the darkening evening ; black birds darted above her head, croaked harshly and accompanied her wandering steps with their fluttering, zigzag course.

She had lost the path, had long left the high road. Now she splashed along in the hollow which lay between the wood and fields. Here it was always damp ; in summer the frogs croaked and the storks strutted about.

There was a pool, farther off another—calm sheets of water surrounded by bushes, they seemed to have no bottom, no sky was reflected in the smooth surface with the green overhanging branches.

Now the water was black. Mina stood on the edge, held on to some willows by one hand and stared and stared.

The marshy soil under her feet gave way and crumbled off, with a soft gurgle it was sucked under by the dark water. Only a bubble appeared on the surface—then nothing more. Not a sound. It remained black and impenetrable.

Mina bent farther and farther forward with a keen, searching curiosity. Her figure was not reflected in it either. Whatever was thrown in there, that was gone.

She looked round. Everything a blank. Nothing in the world but herself and this child. This poor child !

Her wandering eyes were again directed to the pool. More and more wandering, more and more confused.

With a shrill scream she threw back her head, her hat slipped off, and the wind played unhindered with her hair. It drove the damp locks into her face.

Now she closed her eyes tightly, inflated her nostrils, clenched her teeth—held up her child with both arms—there, a rustling!

Startled, she turned round.

There stood an animal, a roe, a few steps from her; it looked at her with its bright eyes. She stared back. They were only separated from one another by the willow bush.

Now a fawn came leaping up, a pretty spotted calf. Mina moved. The doe uttered a warning, whistling sound, the fawn sprang away and the mother darted after it, shielding her child with her own body against supposed danger.

Mina started. She put her hand to her forehead—her hat was gone. Where was it? Now she remembered.

With a deep, trembling sigh she picked up her hat from the damp grass. Then she carefully wrapped up Frida in the shawl and made her way back to the high road.

She trudged along with her head sunk on her breast. She could only walk slowly. Close to the town she had to stop, she could go no farther. She was quite weak; since the train journey she had eaten nothing. Then she thought of her mother's cake, took it out of her pocket, sat down on a milestone and swallowed it with difficulty, it was so dry. Frida eat some of it too. She really felt as if every mouthful would choke her, but still she wetted her finger and picked up every crumb.

It was late in the evening when she arrived at Schwerin; she went straight to the station. "Take the lass back where ye brought her from!" Yes, she would. But she must wait; the train to Berlin left at six in the morning.

She got some milk for the child, she did not touch anything herself, the taste of the cake was still in her mouth and made her feel sick. In the fourth-class waiting-room she sat the whole long night in a corner of the wooden bench and brooded. Frida slept soundly on her breast.

So the morning came.

Mina sat in the train again on her way back to Berlin. It was a beautiful morning, like the day before, light, bright and sunny. Again there were people who wanted to begin a conversation with her, but she gave no answer. She did not look at Frida either. She gazed out of the window with unseeing eyes and compressed

lips. Nobody should disturb her. The thought of what she *must* do absorbed her entirely.

She had taken an unalterable resolution—it had come to her in the long, anxious, wakeful night—she had greeted it as a hope, and then clung to it with all her senses.

Did it not often happen in Berlin that children, much younger than Frida, were deserted? And these children were taken in and cared for; no harm happened to them! There were too many people passing, such a child would not die by the roadside. . . .

It was noon when Mina arrived in Berlin. The National School in the Pallasstrasse was just out when she got to the back of the Botanical Gardens. She had hurried here: here she knew a suitable place where she had often sat with the little Millers. Material for building lay about and the old trees of the garden looked over the wall.

The Elsholtzstrasse was a fine, quiet street, not many carriages went through it, a child was not in danger of being run over. They were all handsome houses; quiet, refined people lived in them with whom a child would be well cared for. A healthy smell of earth and green was wafted across from the Botanical Gardens, the fine air would soon make Frida's cheeks red.

The place pleased Mina. She sat down with Frida. Happy children were playing near, they had made little pits in the unpaved ground and rolled marbles into them; the confusion of gay voices was like the twitter of swallows.

Mina watched them for a time. Then she sat her child on the ground, in the sunshine, but between the stones that she might not fall over, put the bun, which she had bought with her last mite into the little hands, covered the legs carefully with the cloak, kissed her on the forehead, looked round fearfully and then stole away.

The patient little creature in the tartan cloak and red cap with lappets sat there in the sun, as mute and stiff as a doll. . . .

And Mina ran through the streets as if possessed. Everything went round before her eyes, there was perpetual humming and buzzing in her ears. She traversed great distances, restless, driven by terrible excitement.

Had Frida been found?



But oh, she had only just left her.

And she ran farther and farther on.

One o'clock! Two o'clock! Now the children who had to go to the National School would pass by. Ladies returned home from their walk, gentlemen came home from their offices to dinner; governesses with their charges left the Botanical Gardens.

They all went past that way; they must all have seen Frida!

Was she crying? Oh, she was probably crying now, but she would soon laugh. Had not her mother done her best for her! She would understand that too when she passed her mother in the street, well-fed and happy, and in a fine frock. Good heavens, the child would not know her mother at all—how should she? And Mina felt a pang at her heart.

Farther on, only farther away. . . .

Was Frida really not sitting there any more? She would not have had to wait so long! The time refused to pass, every minute seemed an eternity to Mina. As often as she looked at the clocks in the shop-windows, the hand had scarcely moved.

If it were only later? But why was she so restless? Frida had been found long ago, long ago! A lady had come, a lady who had no children herself; she had picked up Frida and adopted her! . . . Mina felt a pang of jealousy—she would hear Frida's first "mamma!" She was not like herself, no longer the sober Mina; she dreamt of fabulous happiness for her child. Her imagination carried her away.

Her eyes were restless and wandering. As she ran through the streets, deadly pale, and with her dress in disorder, many a policeman looked at her sharply. People turned round and gazed after her.

Now she was in the Park. Smartly dressed children were walking with their nurses, boys and girls played on the great sand-heaps. She sat down by them. A little girl, with socks on her sturdy calves, with flying curls round the rosy face, ran against her. Oh, she was just like Frida! Mina could not help herself, she stooped quickly and took hold of the child; she gave a terrified scream and ran away, and the nurse looked angrily at Mina.

Then she fled. Deeper and deeper into the bushes, farther and

farther away from the street. And yet she heard the crying of a child, continually—perpetually.

Her overstrained ears heard the crying of her child behind all the trees, all the houses, in all the streets. . . . The poor, deserted mite sat on the desolate spot; the sun had gone in and no longer shone on the tartan cloak; it was cool. Suppose she should catch cold, fall ill? Ah, only a mother understands how to carry, to rock, to soothe a sick child! It can only get well with her, only the mother can make it live.

A terrible panic seized Mina. The perspiration came out on her forehead. Her knees threatened to give way, she had to sit down on a bench.

She put her fingers in her ears. Now she no longer heard the crying—was Frida dead?

Oh, she was so frightened, so terribly frightened, as if she had killed some one!

She sprang up again. Where was she going? Pedestrians called angrily after her, tram-drivers shouted at her, a policeman caught her arm. She shook him off; she who always used to hesitate before crossing the street, now ran over the tram-lines just in front of the cars. Exhausted as she was, she could still run quickly, very quickly. Already she had reached the square with the Catholic Church, now she passed the National School,—now she could see the tops of the trees in the Botanical Gardens. The green foliage rustled and beckoned.

She did not know herself how she had found the way here, through strange streets, from so far, far away.

She had not the courage to turn into the Elsholtzstrasse; she would only listen from a distance.

At the corner, behind the wall, she stopped. Hark, was not that a little voice? She listened with strained attention, her fist pressed against her heart; it beat so.

Nothing! The little voice was drowned by the rolling of distant wheels, by the hollow murmur, the ceaseless penetrating murmur of a great town.

She must go nearer, only one step! Only one glance to see if Frida were still sitting there!

Her breath came in gasps; she had never trembled so, never

felt such pain. She uttered a suppressed cry . . . there . . . there !

Half mad with joy she rushed nearer. There sat Frida between the stones, in her tartan cloak ! And when the child saw her, the tired little face lit up ; she stretched out her arms, and said distinctly for the first time, " Mam-ma ! " . . .

The tears streamed from her eyes, she thought she must die with happiness. She spoke ! She said, " Mamma ! " Her Frida, her dear Frida !

She stared at the little creature as if she were a wonder. Then she threw herself down by her, caught her to her breast, and almost suffocated her with passionate kisses. She sobbed heart-rendingly. People came up—many of them had passed the little, silent child before without taking any notice of it. As once before in the street, Mina found herself the centre of a gaping, sympathizing, curious crowd.

But she did not escape shyly as she did then.

" It's my little lass," she said proudly, took Frida on her arm and went quietly away. Straight to the Millers ; there were so many children there, one more would make no difference.

Mr. Miller came home from his office especially early to-day ; before he had put on his old house-coat, his wife called him to the kitchen.

There sat Mina with her child on her lap, and fed it with bread sopped in coffee ; the little one swallowed it greedily. Mina looked pale and ill. Mrs. Miller had tears in her eyes ; she took her husband by the arm, whispered eagerly into his ear, and pointed to the hungry little creature.

The servant's story, imperfectly told, and got out of her with difficulty, had deeply touched the mother's heart.

Mr. Miller was affected too. " You can keep the child here for the present," he said. " Certainly for to-night. Then we must see what we can do with it ; I——"

" But it must not go to a stranger again," interrupted the wife, " the poor little thing ! It was dreadful where it was ! "

Her husband raised his eyebrows, and made her a sign to be quiet. " There are very decent foster-mothers, respectable women, who in this way earn a little extra money. No baby farmers, not

a suggestion of that! Perhaps we could even find one in the neighbourhood. I will make strict inquiries; you will go too, Mary, and——”

“I’m to send her away?” Mina looked at him blankly. Then, suddenly restless, she smoothed the child’s hair from her forehead, and put her frock to rights. “Send her away again? No, no!” She stretched out her hands imploringly, shuddered and turned still paler.

“But, Mina,” said Mr. Miller encouragingly, “don’t be foolish! If we can find a place for her in the neighbourhood, you can often go of an evening and look after her.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Miller hastened to assert.

“And Sundays, when it’s your day out, you can take her for a walk!” He painted it to her in glowing colours, and talked till he was full of enthusiasm himself.

Mina did not say a word, she kept her eyes fixed on her master.

The look she gave him confused him—yes, of course, a respectable foster-mother would be dear! And where there was no money? A sigh escaped him. “And then we have orphan-asylums too, yes of course there are orphan asylums for such children!” This fell rather flat.

“Frida ain’t no orphan,” said Mina gloomily.

“No, no, you are there, the mother. I don’t mean exactly orphan-asylums—no, similar institutions! You are a Protestant, are you not?”

“Evangelical.”

“Is the child christened?”

“No.”

“But why not? That does not cost a penny; you get that for nothing in every church, Sunday midday!”

“I had no time. First I was so weak, an’ the third Sunday I was in service again.”

“Hm, hm!”—Mr. Miller scratched himself behind his ears—“not christened? Tiresome! That makes it more difficult. But still I will try. I have connections. We must find somewhere for the child to go.”

“No,” a slight flush overspread Mina’s pale face, “no, I’ll not give her up!”

“What are you thinking of!” Miller got quite angry. “Don’t be so obstinate. You can believe me, such institutions are a blessing. The children grow up with others in the same condition, happy and unsuspecting. Your parents won’t have you—‘have turned you out,’ in plain language—what can you do but be in service?”

“I’ll not give her up!”

“We don’t want to lose you,” cried Mrs. Miller, almost weeping.

“Yes, but there’s nought else to do,” said Mina wearily. “I shall have to go.” She looked at her master and mistress with heavy eyes, at the same time her face took on an obstinate expression. “If ye won’t keep me, I’ll not give her up! She rose. “Mr. Miller, Mrs. Miller, I give you notice. An’ I’d better go at once.” She took some tottering steps towards the door.

“Stop, Mina, nonsense!” Miller caught her by the arm. “We shall not let you go in this uncertainty!”

“What has it to do with you?” she murmured.

The couple exchanged a look.

“How little you know us!” said Mrs. Miller, gently reproachful. “And you have been with us a year!”

“Yes, we are packed together in the small flat like herrings in a barrel,” Miller shrugged his shoulders, “and yet we don’t know one another. You should have told us long ago! We would like to have helped you!”

“Helped—you’d have helped?” Mina opened her eyes and looked at him astonished.

“Yes. Why not? If you had only told us!”

Mina shook her head with a compassionate, almost ironical, smile. “Tell the master and mistress? No!”

Miller nodded. “Sad enough.” And then, as if speaking to himself, “If I had only had eyes!”

For a few minutes it was quiet in the kitchen; the three stood there silent, and looked on the ground.

Then Frida crowed.

Mr. Miller looked at the child thoughtfully. “Such a poor fatherless creature!”

“Oh no!” Mina was quite offended; “Frida has a father. He’s there too.”

“What? Has she? And you only tell us that now?” Miller got quite excited. “But that alters the whole affair!”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mina quietly. “It’s Arthur—Arthur Reschke, from the vegetable shop.”

## XXVI

THE Reschkes’ shop-window was no longer as full as it used to be. The many cardboard slips still dangled there, but if you went into the shop, they were “just out” of this thing and that.

Mrs. Reschke, too, no longer entreated with her old volubility to be sure and come again, and not carry the custom elsewhere. A few pence! What they made now was scarcely worth speaking of. And the drudgery! Yes, one got tired and old; now she understood when her husband complained.

Reschke had been going to the famous doctor at the hospital every day for ten weeks; but his eyes were no better, he could not distinguish stale vegetables from fresh. He was no use at all. And since the affair with Gertrude he was quite muddle-headed. He made no more jokes with the servant-girls, and no longer chucked them under the chin in his old business way. So his wife let him sit quietly in the room behind the shop. There he drank glass after glass of white beer when he happened to be awake; most of the day he slept, that is to say, he dozed with half-shut, blinking eyes.

He no longer drove to the market; the dogs had been got rid of—not sold, but exchanged for a parrot. It could say “Papa” and “Mamma,” “Polly hungry,” “Master,” and “Mistress.” At first it had been a great attraction for buyers; the bell under the steps jingled as in their busiest time. But no sooner had the greengrocer, who lived farther down the street heard of it, than he got an amusing little monkey; now everybody went there.

Two or three times a week, but only after nine in the morning, a cart drove up, bringing fresh goods; it was convenient, the dealer carried them down into the cellar too. But not much was to be made by it. The cost price was too great, and Mother Reschke began to see that her husband had not bought so badly after all.

The vegetables had never been distinguished by great freshness; it was a regular job to pick out what was withered and bad, and to trim the cabbages and bundles of carrots. Special cleverness was necessary to dispose of the pears, they mostly had a rotten spot on one side.

In spite of all this the cellar had customers; trifles that were of no great consequence were still bought there. For however bad the things were they sold, the Reschkes were interesting. There was always something going on. Last winter they had supplied the whole street with a subject of conversation for a long time.

Gertrude was gone. She had simply made off.

Where could she be? The curious servants had stormed the cellar. "A ha'penn'orth of salt!" "A ha'penn'orth of sand!" "A ha'penn'orth of parsley!" "A ha'penn'orth of blacking!" And all the time they kept up a shower of questions and hints, suppositions and suspicions, and the poor mother stood there and could say nothing in defence.

At first Mrs. Reschke had not thought of such a thing, she was cheerful and behaved as if nothing had happened, but it broke her heart to be silent. So she began to talk.

What ingratitude it was! They had sacrificed everything for their children, given them all they had, and they behaved in this way! First Arthur, then Gertrude!

She had passed through the room in the morning when her parents were still in bed. She had nodded to them quite pleasantly, not in her usual sullen manner. "Why are ye so fine to-day?" her mother had asked her, yawning; and her father had grunted, half asleep, "A smart girl! Mother, yer mustn't be so strict wi' her. We're only young once!"

On that morning she had gone away and—not returned.

Some weeks later a girl from the neighbourhood thought she had seen her in a smart hansom, in high spirits, and with a fine

gentleman. But this was all that the parents heard of her—so they said. That Mother Reschke had received a farewell letter from Gertrude, and what the contents were, she concealed, even from her husband.

They no longer spoke of her among themselves. Mrs. Reschke felt a pang at her heart every time she saw Ladewig opposite bowing out the customers or letting down the shutters—*that* hope was gone for ever. But in time she discovered that his legs were crooked and his hands “red enough to frighten ye.”

Whether Father Reschke secretly thought of his daughter he did not betray; as for his wife, she only had a heart for Arthur.

And Arthur came back. Just at the right time. The affair of Gertrude had already lost its charm, curiosity was satisfied, the customers remained away, the cellar was empty—then he appeared.

With a scream, beside herself with joy, his mother clung to his neck; she laughed and wept. No word of reproach was allowed to touch him; as soon as his father opened his mouth she snapped him up: “Do leave Arthur alone! You’ve always got summut to grumble at! Arthur, my son, wot would ye like?” She was as much in love with him as if she were his betrothed.

The first days Arthur was fed up like a little child. He was to sleep till ten, she brought him his coffee to his bedside; she watched anxiously that nobody looked at him askance. And for the present he permitted this tutelage, and stretched himself contentedly. He must have had a hard time of it: his hands were chapped, his clothes nondescript and miserably thin, his boots torn, his cheeks were hollow and his chest sunken.

He was very reserved. His mother wanted to know of his doings during his absence, but to all her questions he only looked at her, silent and gloomy. At last, when she would not leave off, he got violent; she did not want to make him angry, and dared not utter another word.

The bell jingled vigorously again. The servants came with a rush; the first week the Reschkes’ cellar was like a dovecote, with its inmates rushing in and out. Every one wanted to see Arthur, and they all agreed that there was something very



interesting about him, something especially attractive in his pale face and melancholy eyes. What could he not tell them if he only would!

Arthur's health was no better; he was not fit for hard work. Mother Reschke had not been so happy for a long time as when he was dispensed from military service on account of general bodily weakness. So he took upon himself old Reschke's former duties, kept the books, watered the vegetables, was here a little, there a little, and rested most of the time.

To-day the dealer had brought Mrs. Reschke the first cooking-apples; they were so good they could quite well be sold retail as the best eating-apples. So Arthur was set to work to polish them up one by one with an oiled rag.

He sat in the shop in front, and wore a blue apron of his mother's tied round his waist. It was nearly twelve, no one was likely to come now. But hark, a heavy tread came down the steps—slowly, cautiously! The bell twanged and jangled without stopping; it had hardly ever rung so noisily.

A tall figure appeared under the entrance carrying a child on her arm.

Arthur jumped up; the apples rolled from his lap into the farthest corners—it was Mina!

"Morning, Arthur," she said quietly, and held out her hand. He stood there stunned, with a choking sensation in his throat. He stared at her, and then a sudden flush overspread his face and he cast down his eyes.

She did not get white or red. There was no change in her features, only when she showed him the child something like joy passed over her face.

"Arthur, that's the little lass!"

He made an involuntary movement, offered her his hand, and drew it back again timidly. His countenance expressed great discomfort.

"*Our* little lass," she said again. His silence did not irritate her, but with a quick movement she put the child on his arm. He had to catch hold of her or she would have fallen.

"What's—her—name?" he stammered.

"Frida."

He said nothing, nor did she; they stood facing one another silent. The child looked from one to the other with her round eyes.

"Look, Frida, yer papa," Mina said gently. She patted the little one affectionately on the cheek. "D'ye see yer papa?"

Arthur winced. The little thing pulled his moustache confidently.

Mina's face changed suddenly; it became sorrowful. She laid her hand heavily on the young man's arm. "Arthur, I don't know what to do wi' the lass; we'll not leave her to fend for herself, will we?" She looked inquiringly into his face. He tried to avoid her eyes; but, open and direct as they were, they held his.

"What d'ye want? Go away! Leave me in peace," he said roughly, purposely rude.

But she was not to be frightened. "What d'ye think, Arthur? What'll we do?"

"What do I know! Let me be! Damn it all, what am I to do?"

"Yer must—marry me," she said firmly.

At this moment Mrs. Reschke entered the shop. She took in the whole situation at a glance.

"That baggage? Now then," she screamed, and rolled her eyes. "An' the brat? Wot's up? Wot is 't, Arthur?"

She placed herself before her son in a protecting attitude with outspread arms, but Mina pushed her aside.

"I must speak wi' Arthur."

"Indeed, must speak wi' Arthur," the old woman repeated mockingly. "Wot's Arthur to do wi' you? Poking yer nose in again? You've no bizness 'ere, d'ye hear?"

Mina remained quite quiet; she persisted. "I must speak wi' Arthur."

"Fire away, then! I'm curious!" Mrs. Reschke put her arms akimbo.

Mina cleared her throat. For a moment she seemed to be hesitating. Then she said, clearly and distinctly, "It's bad for a child when the mother's a lass. So Arthur 'll marry me."

"Mar—ry? Wot?" Mrs. Reschke nearly swooned. Then she laughed shrilly. "Marry? Lord have mercy—marry! Haha!"

"Don't laugh so stupidly," grumbled Arthur.

Mina drew herself up. "He *must* marry me!"

"Must ——? Hahahaha!" Mrs. Reschke went into convulsions of laughter.

"Yes, *must*," said Mina. "I'm not so stupid as I was by a long way. Mr. Miller have told me that Arthur must give me money every month—*alimony* he calls it—till Frida is fourteen. An' if he won't, I'll go to law; then the perlice 'll fetch him. But I don't want the money. Last night I thought about it, an' I'd rather he'd marry me. It's better for Frida to have a father, Arthur"—she went close up to him—he was still holding the child stiffly on his arm, and took his hand trustingly—"you'll marry me? On account of Frida! Won't ye?"

Arthur cleared his throat embarrassed; he was hot and red like a school-boy caught at some mischief. Without speaking he kept his eyes on the little girl.

"Yes," said Mina eagerly, "look at her; she's just like ye. Lor', Frida do take after ye!"

"Arthur, don't be made a fool of," screamed Mrs. Reschke from the other side. "Any one can say that. Proofs! proofs! Yer booby, I'll tell ye, turn 'er out! Sich a swindler! Sich a gad-about! Sich a——" Her voice gave out. With raised arms she rushed at Mina, flourishing her clenched fist in the air. "Say it again that Arthur's to marry ye! Sich impertinence! D'ye dare? Wot's my Arthur to do with you? Git out o' this! Git out!" She seized Mina by the sleeve.

"Let go, mother!" Arthur dragged the furious woman away from Mina. Mrs. Reschke let him do so, but her fists still fought the air; she retired behind the counter, and from there poured a stream of abuse.

There was no stopping her. Never had Mrs. Reschke's tongue moved so quickly. The words poured out of her mouth like water. Only when her breath gave way she left off for a moment.

The muscles on Arthur's face twitched; he bit nervously at his moustache.

Mina stood quietly; only her changing colour showed her excitement. She had hurriedly taken the child again; now she bent her head over the fair hair of the little one.

"Git out!" screamed Mrs. Reschke, spitting on the floor. "Can't ye get rid o' the beggar?"

Mina suddenly strode up to the counter, exactly opposite to the raging woman. "He'll not get rid o' me." She rested her free hand on the counter, and fearlessly returned the gaze of the flashing eyes. "Hold yer tongue! Yer don't frighten me; I've gone through so much I'm not afraid o' anything. When yer turned me out of the cellar that time I hadn't no courage—now I've got Frida, now I *have* courage. What d'ye think—I ain't come back here for pleasure. You've never treated me well. D'ye remember how you set me at the wash-tub, very first day? I had to wash all yer dirty clothes. An' give threepence a day for my food, too. An' I had brought ye six dozen fresh eggs, I had! But I won't speak o' that now." Her voice became gentle. "Now I've my little lass, nought else in the world. They've turned me out o' doors at home, an' I can't keep Frida with me in service—an' I will keep her, I must keep her! I'll not let her be treated bad, my Frida!" Her voice sank to a low murmur, her mouth was contorted with pain. "Oh no, no!" She had turned quite pale; she stared before her lost in thought. Arthur saw the deep lines on her forehead and was overcome with compassion.

"Don't grieve, Mina!" He was obliged to say it, even though his mother was standing by. His heart softened when he looked at the child on her arm—his child! Something like dismay shot through him, but with it there was another, quite strange feeling, which he had never experienced before. Almost against his will he put out his hand, took the child's soft cheek between two fingers, and pinched it caressingly. "Frida," he said gently.

"Arthur," screamed Mrs. Reschke in a warning tone. And then, "You git out; I'll manage the baggage alone. Ain't got nothin' to do with you!"

"More than with you," he said brutally.

"But Arthur!" Mina pulled his sleeve.

"What then?" he grumbled. "If it hadn't been for the old woman, it 'ud all have been different an' better! Mina's a respectable person—be quiet," he screamed at his mother. "I should say *you* were the last one to give yerself airs!"

Mrs. Reschke was about to fly out again.

"Be quiet," he said again, and his pale face worked with excitement. "Don't you begin again. Mina, sit down!" He pulled forward the stool on which he had sat before to polish the apples.

Mina sat down. Frida looked longingly at the apples in the basket. Arthur gave her an apple, and looked on while she turned it wonderingly in her little hands, and then nibbled at it with the tiny, white teeth. Like a squirrel! The young father smiled.

"Arthur," cried Mrs. Reschke sharply.

"What?" He looked at her absently; at that moment he had quite forgotten her.

"Wot's the meaning of all this?"

He made no answer, but Mina said, glancing at the child, "It's his lass. He must marry me!"

Mother Reschke's indignation knew no bounds. She was not only furious with Mina, but with her son too. The booby!

"Arthur," she shrieked in her terror, "don't stand there like a dummy! She only wants to frighten you! But don't yer be made a fool of. That's all they wants, all o' 'em. Proofs!" She drummed on the table. "Come 'ere with your proofs!" And then she laughed mockingly: "I don't believe till I 'ave the proofs."

Mina looked across at the young man. "Arthur!" There was an appeal, an entreaty to remember in the tone. "Arthur!"

Mrs. Reschke watched her son closely; he had gone dark red, the perspiration came out on his forehead.

"I don't want proofs," said Mina proudly. "I can swear it. An' Mr. Miller says if I can do that Frida 'll get her rights. An' if he don't marry me he must pay. Miller knows all about it; he's summat very high in court. An' if Arthur has nothing to pay, his parents 'll have to. Yes," she concluded, triumphantly, as she saw Mrs. Reschke's fright. "An' I'll not give in. Not if I have to go to law!"

This was not the stupid Mina of former times! She had got up from her stool and stood there drawn up to her full height; to make her speech more impressive she stamped her foot vigorously on the floor at every sentence,

Mrs. Reschke was quite cowed ; that would be a nice thing, to have to pay ! And the disgrace ! She knocked under at last. " Arthur," she timidly whispered to her son, " wot d'ye think, after all yer'll 'ave to acknowledge the child ? "

" Yes, I'll have to." The lines of his young face suddenly sharpened ; a deep furrow was graven on his forehead.

" I think so too," said Mina quietly. She gave Arthur her hand. " Well then, Arthur ! " and handed him Frida to kiss.

Reschke now appeared in the glass door, and Mrs. Reschke burst out once more. She could not take it in—her Arthur was really going to marry Mina ? The innocent and guilty were overwhelmed with reproaches ; she screamed and lamented, tore her hair, reproached God and the world. At last she called her utterly confused husband to her assistance.

But he was altogether in a maze to-day. He had not recognized Mina at first ; when he had blinked at her long enough, holding his hand before his eyes as a screen, he was pleased to see his niece again. He seemed to have quite forgotten what separated them.

" 'Ave ye 'eard, Mina," he said, and pulled her sleeve confidentially, " our Gertie's gone ? "

## XXVII

ARTHUR had rented a room in the Bahnstrasse from the first of November ; the house was only finished in October. They were the first inmates of the room, so Mina had time, before moving in, to clean the paint-splashed windows and to sweep out the shavings and scraps of wall-paper.

As the first of November was a Sunday, there was nothing to prevent the wedding taking place at once.

On the second of November Arthur was to enter upon his duties as house-porter in a shop for india-rubber goods in the Leipzigerstrasse ; Mr. Miller had got the place for him ; the owner of the shop was an acquaintance of his. Fifteen shillings a week

wages. They would be able to manage, for Mina did not intend to be idle; she would go out charing, washing, or undertake any day-work.

Only when she thought of Frida her heart was heavy. Should the child be locked in again? No, no! A new anxiety oppressed her; then came Maggie and said, "I'll look after her!" In the joy of her heart Mina embraced and kissed the pale girl. And then old Reschke suddenly grunted, "The child can stay wi' me an' play. When Gertie was small she crawled on the floor atween my legs an' was as 'appy as anything!"

So Mina was freed from this care, while Mother Reschke still struggled with hers. Who were to be invited to the wedding? It must not be a shabby one, or people would talk.

"In any case," she had said to her husband, "we'll invite yer brother-in-law Heinze an' 'is wife from Golmütz; then we've done our dooty. I don't think they'll come, but they'll send a wedding present; they'll not be sich skinflints not to. Some fat geese, p'r'aps, a few 'ams, fine country liver-sausage; they might send the 'ole of a 'arf pig—Lor, it's the feelin' it's sent with is the principal thing—just wot country-people 'appen to 'ave!"

Mrs. Reschke's indignation knew no bounds when brother-in-law Heinze at once refused the invitation, quite shortly, and without giving any reason: not a word for Mina, no greeting, and—also no present. Mina had much to put up with from her mother-in-law in consequence. "Scurvy lot!" screamed the excited woman, and the parrot screeched "Scurvy lot!" too; it was a new expression it had learnt.

No large wedding-party could be got together, though Mrs. Reschke invited everybody who came into the cellar; "the lame and the blind," as Arthur said bitterly. They all refused. "Ain't fine enough," complained Mrs. Reschke. "An' they're that mean, they won't give no present."

But Bertha was different. Mrs. Reschke, who was still in touch with her, took care of things for her, and even sometimes went to see her of an evening, had announced the engagement to her at once. By return of post came a very grand card with congratulations—a Cupid, two hearts pierced by an arrow; under rose-garlands the inscription, "Fondest good wishes." She was

generous ; she must be invited. And Bertha accepted. She had a wretched place in a lodging-house now with very hard work ; the wages were not good either, as the gentlemen were supposed to give tips. She wrote : " With all the work she had to do, it was unhappily impossible for her to come and fold her beloved friend in her arms ; but she would appear quite early on the wedding-day, so as to place with her own hands the wreath on the head of the lovely bride."

Principally to put a stop to his mother's complaints about the lack of wedding-guests, Arthur had invited Mr. Bartuschewski, the "deputy-landlord" of the new house in the Bahnstrasse, who lived on the ground-floor in the court, and had to look after the lighting and water supply, and keep the stairs and pavement clean. His wife turned out to be an old acquaintance, the anæmic young Marie of former times. She was certainly no longer young, but still anæmic. Bloodless and weak she stood in the midst of her noisy family of four—three step-children and one of her own ; the fifth was not far off. The couple accepted the invitation with great delight. Mr. Bartuschewski suffered from a chronic good appetite, and Marie, as of old, had always a hankering after something special.

Out of gratitude for the invitation Mr. Bartuschewski lent some blocks of wood out of the cellar which the upholsterer had forgotten ; with boards laid over them and covered with a white cloth, they lengthened the dining-table. And Marie, who made paper flowers for sale in her spare time, presented some as table decoration.

It was the first time that Arthur had smiled since his engagement, when, the evening before the wedding, he inspected the room, which was now ready, and as neat as a new pin. Drawing a deep breath he went to the window and looked down on to the sea of houses far below with their twinkling starlike lights, and then along the railway-track of the Potsdam line.

" We can see the trains pass," he said to Mina, who was on her knees, wiping the skirting-board, for the last time. " We can imagine we're going on a journey too, like millionaires !"

She did not understand him. " If we've only enough to eat," she said, and looked round well satisfied.



There was not much in the room: a bed, a basket for Frida, four chairs, a table, a wardrobe, a looking-glass—all on the instalment system. On the wall by the iron stove which also served for cooking hung a shelf with hooks for kitchen utensils; that was Father Reschke's present. Every little pot, every ladle was tied with sky-blue tape.

When Mina returned to the cellar—she had been sleeping there the last few nights since she left her place—Arthur was already installed in the new lodging, Mother Reschke was very particular about morality and propriety—there was a surprise waiting for her. A parcel, a parcel from home!

The address was ill-spelt and almost illegible.

Who had written it? Mina had never seen her mother's handwriting. With trembling hands she tore off the wrappings. Oh dear, eggs, only eggs in an old basket—smashed, in spite of the chopped straw between them! The yellow liquid ran over her fingers.

And in between was a coarse sheet of paper quite wet through, the writing scarcely legible—

“dear dorter I wishes yer joy on yer marridge—Heinze don't know nothing o' this

“yer Loving Mother.”

Mina was obliged to weep. Did she weep because the eggs were all broken? She herself did not know the reason; the tears just rolled down her cheeks.

Mrs. Reschke lamented; she was quite beside herself at the loss of the beautiful, fresh eggs. With a spoon she tried to scoop up into a jug what could still be used; if some chopped straw did get in, too, that did not matter, it would do for a cake. She brought out flour and milk and sent Ella to the baker's for yeast.

Mina was of no use, she stood there with her eyes fixed on the ruins of the crushed basket.

The front door-bell jangled. Ella came back breathless. “Mamma,” she said, with the respect for riches that had been inculcated into her, “come quick, the rich lady from up-stairs! Mamma, do make haste!”

“Lor' now, wot's the 'urry? She'll want a ha'penn'orth of carrots!

But still I'll not let 'er wait. I'm just kneadin' ; you go, Mina, but bustle a bit, quick, quick !”

Miss Abercorn stood in the shop, her shabby, black leather bag on her arm. Mrs. Reschke was right, a ha'penn'orth of carrots, and also a ha'penny bunch of parsley. Mina served her plentifully, much more than Mrs. Reschke was accustomed to give.

The black eyes were less piercing, the lean, severe face brightened a little. As if excusing herself the lady said, “I only require small quantities, I eat so little. Carrots are the only vegetables that agree with me.”

“Oh, they're wholesome,” Mina assured her, “especially against worms.”

“I haven't any, thank Heaven !” Miss Abercorn twisted her mouth into a sort of smile, then she looked at the girl sharply. “Aren't you Mrs. Reschke's daughter-in-law ?”

“Yes.”

“You seem to be a sensible person. Would you be able to undertake a place for some hours daily ?”

“O' course, that's just what I want.”

The lady looked at her sharply again. “With me ?”

Now Mina got a fright ; not a servant would stop with Miss Abercorn, that was known in the whole house. There must be a reason for it. She changed every month.

But what did that matter ? She could at least try ; it was a nice addition at once to what they had. So she looked frankly in the lady's face. “If yer'll have me.”

“Very well ; can you come early to-morrow ?”

“To-morrow ! Excuse me, it's my wedding-day.”

The lady looked cross. “Indeed, I am sure you could spare the few hours if you liked. Then the day after to-morrow, punctually at seven o'clock.” She raised her forefinger warningly. “Don't forget.”

“How should I ? Here's my hand on't !” Mina seized the thin hand in a shabby black kid glove and shook it heartily.

Miss Abercorn's face expressed astonishment at this open-hearted familiarity.

Mrs. Reschke was very angry that Mina had not at once stipulated how much she should get a month.

“Fifteen shillings at least. Yer could ’ave asked that certain; could ha’ put the screw on, she’s in a regular ’ole now. An’ she’s got it. Nobody ’ud think to look at ’er ’ow many thousands she ’ave. Looks as if she were a goin’ beggin’. Not a poor person that comes to ’er door gits anythin’, she makes a row then; but if some one come to collect for buildin’ churches, or for charity, ’er name’s written top o’ the list an’ she gives a big sum. People who’re as grand as that, pinches elsewhere. See that yer fleece ’er well.”

“I will,” said Mina, but her thoughts were far away. Was not to-morrow her wedding-day? She did everything that was to be done, mechanically, as in a dream.

In the evening Maggie slipped into her room with her shoes in her hand so that her parents could not hear her steps. She put two little books on the counterpane—Mina was already in bed—*Hymn-book of the Salvation Army* and *Confessions of a Happy Salvation Army Soldier*. She looked down affectionately at the sleepy girl, bent over her and whispered into her ear, “There, that’s the best I have. Hallelujah!”

But Mina grunted something unintelligible and turned over. Then Maggie crept away.

The Sunday was mild and sunny. Mrs. Reschke was unhappy about the weather, she would rather the bride had got rain on her wreath; that brought luck. But Mina was glad it was dry and the sky cloudless; she would not get dirty footprints on her freshly painted floor now.

The day had begun well altogether. The Miller children had been there and brought their parents’ wedding present; a beautiful coffee set with gold rims and strewn with red daisies and green leaves. Mina was quite beside herself with delight; but she was happiest over the little bunch of flowers given her by Irma, who came on the arm of the new girl, a disagreeable, cross-looking person. She hugged and kissed the child who had caused her so many sleepless nights with a passionate, grateful tenderness.

While the couple, accompanied by Father Reschke and Mr. Bartuschewski, were at the registrar’s office, Bertha appeared. She brought the wreath and veil with her. Mrs. Reschke exam-

ined the wreath with the air of a connoisseur. "Very pretty, Bertha. Looks like artificial."

"So it is," said Bertha proudly, "look, wax!" And she let Mrs. Reschke feel the waxen orange-blossom buds; they were two inches long, and together with glossy green waxed leaves formed a diadem a hand's-breadth high. Now there was no end to the admiration—artificial! "Grand, Bertha, real grand! Yer are generous."

When Mina came back she was to try it on at once, but she got very red and took the wreath off hastily. "No, no!"

Her mother-in-law was furious. "Now then, wot's up? Don't be a ninny! It's that beautiful and tasteful."

"No, I don't deserve it," said Mina softly, and cast down her eyes.

"So, that's it! We ain't in a village 'mong the old fashions! We're in the town with 'lightened people. Of course yer puts it on; wot 'ud people think if ye didn't?" So Mina sat in her new lodging and let Bertha adorn her.

The two friends were alone in the room. At Mina's entreaty Arthur had gone to be shaved and get his hair cut; he must not go up to the altar with such a stubby chin and untidy head.

Mina sat motionless, while Bertha operated on her hair with the curling-tongs, chattering the whole time. "At Miss Schmettana's I learnt to curl hair fine. If I hadn't had bad luck, I could ha' been maid to a countess. Well, at Schmettana's there was always summat to see. Sometimes I laughed fit to die. She couldn't read and write properly, but all her petticoats was silk. Ever so grand! She was really quite nice, sometimes we were like sisters an' then she told me everything. But when she got her tempers, I was nasty too; wasn't going to put up with anything from her. An' then I burnt her well with the curling-tongs when I did her hair. Do keep still, Mina."

Her quick fingers tugged here and tugged there, the bride's straight hair was difficult to wave. But at last Bertha's skill triumphed; even if it smelled a little burnt, there was soon a mass of curls on forehead and temples. Now the long veil was fastened on, then the wreath.

"Ready," said Bertha, well pleased, and helped the bride in

the body of her black woollen dress. It was the same that Mina had got a year before Frida was born ; it was still as good as new, only rather shiny where the seams had been let out.

Maggie brought Frida, who was also to be made smart. The child screamed when her mother bent over her in her strange head-dress.

Bertha, too, got ready ; she had brought her wedding finery with her in a cardboard box ; an elegant white dress from Miss Schmettana, trimmed with much lace and fluttering silk ribbons. She was just tripping round the ready-laid table with bare shoulders, in an embroidered petticoat, open-work stockings and patent leather shoes when Arthur returned. He looked at her with admiration—she would have been a handsome bride !

The wedding was at a quarter to two. Mother Reschke had insisted on the church ceremony ; all the best people did this, first came the civil marriage, and then the one in church. And then the wedding should not be at dusk like common people's ; no, it should be quite alone in broad daylight ; they would be able to manage the few shillings which that would cost. They must reckon, too, that it would cost nothing for Frida to be christened at the free christening at two o'clock. They could make one business of it, it made no difference ; and it was convenient too ; they would kill two birds with one stone and would not have the trouble of going to church twice.

The wedding-carriage came soon after one ; Mother Reschke had ordered it for her Arthur. All the children of the neighbourhood, and many grown-up too, stood round the door and gazed curiously while the couple got in, followed by Bertha and Frida, who sat on the back seat.

While they rolled along to the Luther Church, Mina did not speak a word, nor Arthur either. She looked steadfastly on to her lap ; he gazed out of the window and twisted and turned the top-hat which his father had lent him.

Outside the church they were awaited by their relations. Father Reschke, who had drunk several glasses of white beer in honour of the event, was in very good spirits, Mother Reschke, on the contrary, was excited. Her lips trembled, as she surveyed Mina from head to foot—indeed, she would have wished Arthur some-

body else. That her poor boy should be taken in so. She took Bertha's arm at once and went a little way aside with her.

Mrs. Bartuschewski had remained in the lodging of the young couple to make the coffee; Maggie basted the joint of pork in the cellar at home. Mr. Bartuschewski buttonholed Arthur and asked him anxiously if there would be enough beer. Ella had escaped from her mother's hand and showed off her blue sash and white frock, in which she was miserably cold, to a troop of street children.

So Mina stood quite alone.

Her eyes wandered over the broad square with the bare bushes and the leafless trees; the autumn wind played with a last brown leaf and whirled it into the gutter.

Mina looked for Frida—oh, if she had only been allowed to have her on her arm!

She was glad when the sexton unlocked the vestry door.

A number of women and men went in with them carrying little muffled and wrapped-up bundles; when the coverings were taken off, they turned out to be babies waiting for the christening at two. Mina raised her head involuntarily—was any one of these children as handsome and sweet as Frida? She compared them secretly, and forgot herself so completely in doing so that she started when the sexton pulled her sleeve. With a dignified movement of his hand he pointed to the door which led from the vestry to the interior of the church.

Arthur offered her his arm; she stumbled over her dress, caught her veil in something; her heart beat quickly and then stopped; she felt so embarrassed.

She was quite overcome by the height of the vaulted roof; it was very different to the little village church at home! She felt terrified, oppressed, humiliated under these heaven-aspiring pillars. Subdued light fell through stained-glass windows. A mist rose before her eyes, the gay-coloured mosaic floor, on which she trod, she only saw indistinctly.

She went up to the altar hesitatingly. The clergyman spoke indistinctly, she did not understand what he said. From the distance the roar of the streets penetrated into the quiet church.

There was nothing familiar about her, nothing that she knew and loved, everything was new and strange—everything, everything! And the man, too, at her side was strange, quite strange! She herself was a leaf, torn from the tree, on which it had hitherto hung.

Mina felt how her heart contracted; hot tears came into her eyes—there—a lispng sound in the strange, terrifying void! Frida's little, thin, weak voice.

No, she would not weep! Her face brightened. She bent nearer to the youthful figure at her side—was he not the father of her child?

When the clergyman joined their hands, Mina pressed her husband's hand with all her strength.

## XXVIII

FRIDA had been very good, with the exception of saying "Mamma" loudly and distinctly just at the conclusion of the address to the wedded couple. At the christening she did not scream like the other unreasonable children; she sat straight upright on Mina's arm, and with big, wondering eyes looked sometimes at the clergyman, sometimes at her mother's wreath and veil.

Now she sat at the wedding-table and munched at a large piece of cake which she held tight with both hands.

At present the party was anything but a lively one. "Mortal slow," Mrs. Reschke whispered to her neighbour, Mr. Bartuschewski.

She herself had red eyes; in the course of the last few years she had become much more emotional—"nerfus" as she called it—in church she had wept without stopping, the tears dropped from her cheeks on to the high bosom of her black silk. On the way home from church she was all plaintive melancholy. "When I think," she said to her husband, on whose arm she hung heavily, "that Arthur has a little un'—Lor' 'ow the time do go! Who

knows 'ow long it 'll be 'fore we pop off! Reschke, yer close on sixty! Lor'! Lor'!" She only lost some of her sentimentality after having glanced into her cellar in passing, where she found Maggie had not basted the joint of roast pork sufficiently.

Mina was very silent. On coming home she had wanted to take off her wreath and veil at once, but Bertha caught at her arm, and her mother-in-law also protested energetically: "Don't yer dream of takin' it off! 'Ave yer no feelin'? When I thinks wot a moment that were when Reschke took my wreath from my 'ead!"

There was nothing to be done, Mina had to remain in her bridal attire; she was only allowed to fasten up the veil, which caught everywhere, with a few large pins. The unaccustomed way of doing her hair gave her headache, the heavy wreath weighed her down, the many hairpins hurt; she held her head quite stiffly.

Bertha made herself useful. The coffee which Mrs. Bartuschewski had got ready was drunk up at once; the four little Bartuschewskis, who were not invited but had come as a matter of course, had done full justice to it. Then Bertha turned up her beautiful dress, so that her embroidered petticoat, dainty ankles and shiny shoes could be admired, took the coffee-mill between her knees and ground away quickly for another brew.

The men gazed open-eyed; even old Reschke grinned. Bartuschewski wiped his mouth, and then called out to his wife, "That's summat else than yer old down-at-'eelers!"

Mother Reschke recovered her spirits after the fresh brew of coffee. She put little pieces of sugar into her mouth, taking a sip out of her cup every time. When Bartuschewski, who had bitten into his slice of cake, suddenly began to spit and to storm, "Wot's in the thing?" she smiled roguishly.

"Lemon-peel, worthy Mr. Bartuschewski, finest lemon-peel be there!"

"Well, yer do it grand anyways," he said, and ate with enjoyment the chopped straw that had found its way into the cake.

Soon there was nothing left of the cake; there were also some Berlin pancakes, but they had disappeared even more quickly.



Fortunately Maggie appeared about six o'clock, accompanied by a man carrying a tall market basket. Out of this was taken a really huge joint of roast-pork, some dishes of stewed prunes and herring-salad, stacks of cheese-sandwiches and a deep soup-tureen full of pickled herrings. "Put 'em on one side for afterwards," said Mother Reschke, who saw to the unloading.

That smelt prime! The little Bartuschewskis raised a howl of joy; they had been tugging at their mother's gown for a long time: "Mummy, hungry! hungry, mummy!"

"Horrid little brats," thought Bertha, "I'd like to have to deal wi' them!" Aloud she said, "Charmin' children, Mr. Bartuschewski!"

"Ain't none so charmin' as you, miss!" Mr. Bartuschewski made her a polite bow.

She smiled and exchanged a quick look with Arthur—he was the most refined here, there was no mistake about it: he did not suit his surroundings any more than she.

Arthur took this look for a challenge.

And now the two husbands exhausted themselves in politeness to the young lady; one tried to outdo the other in jokes and compliments, which were often very daring.

Ella had come quite near and listened to this conversation with eager, sparkling eyes; she seemed to drink in every word.

Mrs. Bartuschewski did not listen to her husband's talk at all, she had enough to do to satisfy her children; even the youngest did his part. He had crept on to her lap, thumped on the table with his little fists, and nearly screamed himself hoarse.

They all enjoyed it; the coffee and cake had only whetted their appetites: in anticipation of the wedding-meal they had all eaten nothing the whole day.

Mrs. Bartuschewski devoured her food with the same eagerness as formerly in the Reschkes' cellar. Mrs. Reschke's face shone as if polished; she had spread her handkerchief over her ample bosom to avoid spotting herself.

The roast pork was extremely fat, there was almost too much oil in the salad. The bill of fare was not exactly choice, Mother Reschke had not thought it worth while to make it so to-day, but they should at least eat their fill at her Arthur's wedding.

For a while nothing was heard but the sound of eating, smacking of lips, and now and again a hiccough. Only Bertha put little bits daintily into her mouth, and fastidiously turned over the food on her plate.

There was plenty of beer on the table ; but the fat made them thirsty, the number of empty bottles increased rapidly. And the more empty bottles there were, the higher their spirits rose—Mrs. Reschke had never believed she would be so gay at this “rotten” wedding.

No discord disturbed the harmony till suddenly Father Reschke murmured, but still distinctly heard by all, “If only Gertrude were ’ere !” He uttered a deep sigh.

His wife threw him a reproving look—how could he begin about that now? “Wot yer doin’?” she screamed angrily at Maggie, who had placed herself by her father and at this sigh had ventured to lay her cheek on his shoulder. “Let father be, ’e’s ’ad a drop too much as it is. Be off, wot d’ye want?”

Maggie disappeared timidly from the table ; she had a real talent for vanishing noiselessly.

The young wife kept her eyes fixed on her plate between the pots of hyacinth—one of pink, the other of blue paper—the wedding-present of the Bartuschewskis. Her appetite was long satisfied, she had a choking sensation in her throat. Her hand played absently with Frida’s hair, her thoughts wandered, her eyes grew misty, the corners of her mouth went down—no one troubled about her.

Bertha led the conversation. She was leaning back, her arms crossed on her breast, and rocking her chair. Laughing, she related, as she expressed it, one good joke after the other out of her life.

She was now in her ninth place since she had left the Selingers. First at Miss Schmettana’s. Then with a divorced gentleman ; but she only stayed there a week—“He was too amiable,” as she said, with a short, coquettish laugh. Then with a widow, a baroness—“The daughters dressed up and went skatin’ every day, and in the evenin’ to a ball, but no bills were paid, nor wages either.” Then to a shrew of a woman—no decent girl would stay with her. Then an exotic family—“the man from Honolulu,

his wife from Nakel, but both had fleas." Then in succession with an acrobat, the manager of a theatre, an African traveller, and now in a lodging-house.

She had certainly had ill luck ; but—with a curl of her upper lip she showed her beautiful white teeth—if she did not get on in one place, then try somewhere else ! Now she was accustomed to moving about, and was wise enough not to unpack bag and baggage at once.

The listeners held their sides with laughter ; Mrs. Bartuschewski was quite unwell from it. Mrs. Reschke's bosom shook, she clapped her hands together : "Bertha, Bertha ! She be as good as a clown ! Quite as good as a clown !"

Bartuschewski and Arthur enjoyed it most ; they insisted upon Bertha sitting between them. She did so smiling, but blinked at Mina at the same time—she need not be afraid, she, Bertha, knew quite well how far to let the men go.

Bartuschewski struck his glass ; all thought he would propose the health of the wedded couple, but he cried, "Miss Bertha, long may she live ! Hoch, hoch, hoch !" When his wife wished to clink glasses with him he was regularly rude. "Jealous old woman ? D'yer know wot, I don't get cake every day. Let me be, yer old stale loaf !"

He was certainly rather fuddled. Most of them were. The children raced round the table ; a clatter, one of the Millers' beautiful cups fell to the ground—in pieces.

Thick impenetrable tobacco smoke rose to the ceiling. The thirst increased. Bartuschewski offered to go to a public-house near and fetch more beer. "Bring some white beer too," Father Reschke called after him.

When he returned he declared that Mr. Reschke had ordered "a dram of summat." Out of his coat-tail pocket he produced a bottle of whisky.

The old man grinned ; Whisky was excellent for the stomach, especially after such rich food. They all thought the same. Mrs. Bartuschewski had already complained of indigestion, and Mrs. Reschke had unbuttoned the body of her dress a little.

The men sat in shirt-sleeves. It was oppressively hot in the room. The window-panes were covered with steam, but nobody

thought of opening a window. Anything but that, they would rather swelter !

Mrs. Reschke thought the moment come for her prodigy to show off her singing, and in conclusion present a basket to the young couple. But Bartuschewski forestalled her ; he had taught his three eldest something.

At a sign from him they advanced before the couple, and bleated in union the poem about the stork which Mr. Bartuschewski had remodelled for this occasion. The recitation was greatly praised by their father, who, as a reward, allowed them to take a good sip out of his glass ; they drank with their eyes screwed up.

Arthur was disagreeably affected by these allusions ; he cast a shy glance at Frida, left off laughing and brooded silently.

Ella had been on the look-out, envy in her heart ; now she began to sing at the top of her voice. It was not a happy idea to commence with—

“ Alma, our Alma, has left us on a sudden.”

Reschke's face began to work and twitch, he pulled out his coloured pocket handkerchief, blew his nose, and then, all at once, wept loudly.

“ Gertrude, our Gertrude ! ” he sobbed.

But the refrain repeated by all in chorus soon drowned his sobs.

“ Alma, Alma, where can the girl have gone ?  
Perhaps she's run down in the street,  
Perhaps her heart has ceased to beat ! ”

Mother Reschke joined in vigorously. “ Wot's the use o' grieving ? ” she said to Bertha, during a pause in the singing. “ We'll 'ave a good time for once in our lives. It's all humbug till we kicks the bucket.”

“ D'ye know,” Bertha whispered back, “ Miss Schmettana were as like as not born in a cellar—Gertrude'll have done well for herself.”

“ D'yer think so ? Then she could 'a sent summut for the wedding.”

Mina nudged her husband. "Tell Ella to leave off that song. Father's cryin' so."

The young husband looked at his wife—she was good-natured, there was no denying that! "Will ye be quiet," he screamed at his sister; "leave off that trash!"

"Well, what shall I sing then? I'll not sing at all," pouted the child.

"Yer'll not do that, Ella!" cried her mother frightened. "Let 'er be, Arthur! If father's so silly it's 'is affair. Ella, sing 'The Good Aunt from Epping,' or, wot's still better, that about love! Yer know." And her mother began in a quavering voice beating time with hand and foot—

"I did not know what love is——"

and her daughter went on flippantly—

"I did not know myself,  
Then Arthur, who's a friend o' mine——"

Maggie suddenly stood by her sister and pulled at her dress. "Shan't sing! No—no!"

Ella took no notice of her.

"I questioned, I myself.  
He took me to a restaurant——"

"No, no!" Maggie pressed her hand on Ella's mouth. Now the child screamed all the more—

"Gave me champagne so prime and fine,  
And kissed——"

"No—no—shan't——shan't!"

Now Ella got furious; she resisted. "Silly Maggie!

"And kissed me on the mouth  
And said:—"

"Let go! Oh, mamma, she's pinchin' me! Oh, let go!"

Maggie did not let go, although Ella kicked and scratched.

"Yer crazy, Maggie!" Mother Reschke was just going to hurry to Ella's help when she stopped dumfounded.

Maggie had raised her voice too, and tried to drown Ella's screeching with her own singing.

But of the verse :

“ The hour will soon come,  
The cry will soon sound,  
That Jesus as judge will appear.  
Oh now, save your soul, ”

only some disjointed words were understood. She could not succeed in silencing Ella.

She, on the contrary, sang, articulating every syllable distinctly—

“ From drinking, kissing soon I glowed . . . ”

“ . . . Jesus . . . judge will appear . . . .  
Oh now . . . . your soul ! . . . ”

stammered Maggie.

Ella did not allow herself to be disturbed, she sang on steadily, roughly laying her finger on her lips :

“ Yes, yes, the champagne did it,  
No, no, I'll not confess,  
For wine is often guilty,  
There, there, you'll guess the rest. ”

A resounding clapping of hands, a laughing “ Bravo ” rewarded her.

Maggie looked round despairingly, then she gave up the unequal contest. Her head low on her breast, she crept to the door.

Nobody detained her.

Bartuschewski thumped on the table—that was a splendid joke, the long thin girl with the Salvation Army song ! He rolled about on his chair, laughing.

“ You should get her into the Salvation Army, Madam Reschke. She'd wake them up, I can tell ye ! ” And rolling his eyes he began to imitate Maggie in a squeaking, falsetto voice.

Mother Reschke was offended now ; even though it was only Maggie. She rebuked Mr. Bartuschewski rather sharply for his unsuitable jokes ; to herself she resolved strictly to forbid the crazy girl visiting the Salvation Army. “ Such a disgrace, ” she grumbled. “ But a 'iding, a regular 'iding she'll have as soon as I git 'er 'ome ! ”

Frida had fallen asleep on Mina's lap ; with nothing comfortable to rest against, her little head wagged to and fro.

"Goodness, Mina," said Mother Reschke irritably, "do put the child to bed ! It's cruelty, nought else ! Bed's the place for children," she added, with a venomous side-glance at the little Bartuschewskis.

Mrs. Bartuschewski did not or would not take the hint, but Mina got up, and carried the child, who was sleeping soundly in spite of the noise, to her cot. Oh, she would gladly have lain down herself, she was so tired she could have dropped, and her eyelids were heavy. From now she struggled with sleep the whole time.

The others were all the merrier, even Arthur. He lifted Ella on his knee, and she, made bold by his unaccustomed tenderness, pursed up her lips, and as he did not kiss her, kissed him. Then she sat on Mr. Bartuschewski's lap. "She'll be a oner," he said, and the mother smiled, flattered.

An unusual fit of tenderness came over Mrs. Reschke too. Her eyes had got quite small, she let her head sink on her husband's shoulder. "D'yer remember our wedding-day, Jacob ?"

Reschke was quite frightened. Since time immemorial she had not called him Jacob ; not since Gertrude's birth ! Emotion overcame him again, he hiccoughed and sniffled and wiped his bleary eyes.

The old whisky had made them warm ; Bartuschewski's face was crimson. He playfully rubbed his beard on Ella's cheek, and then called his wife to him, "Let's be friends again, old woman !" He patted her on the back and stroked her arm, which he had pinched black and blue in a quarrel the day before. They billed and cooed like two pigeons.

"Now then," said Bertha, pretending to pout, but with a mocking gleam in her eyes. "Am I left all alone ? Ain't there no one for me ?"

"'Is no man there for my Wanda ?'" sang Arthur suddenly. Oh, he could be agreeable if it were worth while ! He drew his chair nearer to hers, and put his arm behind her. A memory of his school-days came to him, sitting beside Bertha. He recited, "Oh, tender longing, sweet hope !"

She rapped his fingers. "Hands off! Eyes to the right!" There sat Mina.

Everything was going round before Arthur's eyes; he took his wife round the neck, drew her quite close to him, and pressed a resounding kiss on her lips.

"Attention!" cried Bartuschewski and saluted. "But we're not goin' yet, not for a long time!"

Mina did not return the kiss, or resist it, she took it quietly.

Hours passed. Bartuschewski had gone down into the public-house again, but this time he only brought spirits and a sweet liqueur for the ladies.

Bertha took constant sips of this; her little red tongue darted over her lips—ha, that tasted as sweet as sugar!

At last they began to dance; Mr. and Mrs. Reschke, Mr. and Mrs. Bartuschewski, Bertha with Arthur. Ella sat on the table, clapped her hands and crowed. The gentlemen whistled.

They were soon tired, but not Bertha. Arthur leant in one corner, Bartuschewski in another; Bertha danced on alone, a mocking, contemptuous smile round her mouth.

It was going on for three when Bartuschewski had to bring his wife down-stairs; she was quite unwell all at once and groaned; the pickled herrings had lost their charms for her. Then, swearing and storming, he carried down his children, one after the other; they had lain in a corner on the floor and were not to be waked up.

Father Reschke was not to be waked up either. After one o'clock he had laid himself on the bed of the young couple, only for "fi-fi-five mi-nutes," as he assured them hiccupping. He still lay there; his cigar had fallen out of his mouth, and had burnt a hole in the counterpane.

They screamed at him, shook him, pinched him, pulled his nose, tugged at his legs, poured water into his face—all in vain, he did not awake. Mrs. Reschke had to make up her mind to go home without him, with Ella and with Bertha, who was to sleep in the cellar that evening.

Mina stood at the window and looked out into the dark night. Not a star on the sky. She was obliged to think of Matilda, and



how she had looked forward to her wedding! Slowly she raised her hands and dragged the wreath out of her hair.

On a chair at the table sat Arthur fast asleep, his body hanging forward without any support, his heavy head wagging to and fro. She went back to the table mechanically, sat down by her husband, and leant her head on his shoulder. He snored. The old man on the bed snored too, a hollow, rattling snore. Frida breathed softly in her cot.

No sleep came to Mina's eyes. When morning dawned she awoke her husband. "Arthur, get up! You've a long way to walk, an' I must go to Miss Abercorn."

## XXIX

Six weeks after the wedding of Arthur and Mina the Bartuschewskis' fifth child was born. To return the hospitality shown them young Mrs. Reschke was asked to be godmother; but she refused. She had no money to buy a present with.

They were still in debt at the public-house from the wedding, three shillings for spirits and liqueur, and six shillings for beer. And the furniture-dealer had already sent in the receipt for the first payment; with great trouble Mina had got together the few shillings, but she thought with terror of the next payment which would soon be due. Suppose they were to fetch away the wardrobe or even the bed? The publican was more likely to wait for his money, as he made something by Arthur every day; a glass of white beer, and at the end of the week he sat for a few hours in the public-house in the evening.

The Bartuschewskis were very offended that Mina had refused the proffered honour. When she came to pay her visit to the woman she turned her back on her and her face to the wall.

"Your wife's a nice 'un," Bartuschewski said to Arthur. "I'd soon drive her humours out o' her."

To conciliate the people, with whom it would have been really unwise to quarrel, Arthur accepted the invitation for himself, and

with the half of his weekly wages bought the baby a beautiful electro-plated mug.

Mina was beside herself when he showed her his grand present with a beaming face. "You're crazy!" she brought out. "When we've got so much to pay."

He looked at her so angrily that she did not venture another word.

"Must ye always spoil my pleasure?" he said gloomily; threw the mug away from him with such force that it rolled through the room and the thin embossed metal got a dent.

Mina picked up the mug silently, pressed and knocked it to give it the proper shape again.

"Let be!" screamed her husband, and snatched it out of her hand. "I'll not go at all. Haven't got any wish now!"

But he did go. The christening party lasted till late in the night, and next morning he had a headache and would rather not have gone to work.

Yes, the place as house-porter was Mina's trouble. Fifteen shillings a week was too little! Together with the three shillings and sixpence which she got every week for her work at Miss Abercorn's, it was just enough for the most necessary things; but nothing unforeseen must happen.

Between Mina's eyebrows appeared a fold which became deeper and deeper the longer the winter lasted. No, she must try to earn more. It was not possible to be more saving with food and fuel. She must go out to work for the whole day.

She gave a quick glance at Frida—oh, how she had blossomed out under her mother's watchful care. It was of no use, nothing had been of any use, after all she must leave her to others.

For the first time Miss Abercorn was satisfied with her servant. It was the first time, too, that she lost her suspicion. When Mina first came she always watched what she did. Now she trusted her sufficiently to remain at her desk in the sitting-room, writing and reckoning with papers covered with figures, and the stocks and shares list before her, while her charwoman made the bed in the bedroom where the iron safe was.

Miss Abercorn's front door was always locked twice and the chain put up; she did not allow it to be taken down when the door was opened.

She was full of nervous dread. "One knows how wicked people are," she once said to Mina in an especially confidential moment. "And ladies living alone, they can be so easily—oh!" She shuddered and did not continue. An expression of terror made her wizened face appear still more wizened, her piercing eyes looked more piercingly into every corner and then sought Mina's face.

What use was all her money to her? Mina shook her head. The only callers were postmen bringing money, or people of the lower classes who came to pay interest. Then she went out to carry away the money; she was very anxious to keep it secret, but still Mina saw how she packed notes and rolls of gold into her shabby black leather bag.

Every one who came was conferred with over the chain. The collectors, who frequently called, were dispatched in this way too; only the clergymen and the heads of charitable societies were asked in.

But even from her charity she had no pleasure. No poor person came into her house who said, "May God reward you!" She never experienced the pleasure of making a poor woman on the back-stairs happy with a cup of warm coffee, or hungry children with a slice of bread and butter, or an infirm man with a halfpenny.

Mina's heart ached when she witnessed how Miss Abercorn, without a word, slammed the door in the face of the supplicants. As long as she had been in service she had never known what that meant, "Give us this day our daily bread"—she had always had enough to eat and drink; but now——!

The winter was long, many poor people came. It was a speaking, reproachful look which Mina gave her lady. She seemed to have understood the look; shortly afterwards she appeared in the kitchen, her lean finger pointed convulsively to a paragraph in the newspaper printed in bold type. Somewhere a young fellow begging had strangled the woman who opened the door to him and then ransacked her dwelling.

Mina spelt it through laboriously, then she was obliged to laugh—that was what Miss Abercorn was afraid of! Her laughter seemed to frighten the lady still more; she retired to the kitchen

door, her finger, which she still held outstretched, trembled, her face, her whole appearance, expressed the greatest horror, the deepest agitation.

Mina felt pity for the solitary old woman. "Ye needn't be afraid o' me," she said good-naturedly. "I couldn't even kill a hen well, it were always an effort."

But this assurance did not seem to have the desired effect. It struck Mina that Miss Abercorn again showed something of her former reserve and mistrust; this grieved her, but she soon forgot this grief in other cares.

Mina looked out for work, either charing or washing. She posted herself before the branch office of the *Lokalanzeiger*, and seized upon the first newspaper containing advertisements which came out. She did not mind how far off the work was. And so she succeeded in getting charing in Moabit, washing at Hallesches Thor, and Saturdays she went to help in a house in the Friedrichstadt. Her employers saw her sturdy figure and made sure they had found a good worker.

But Frida? Old Reschke was very willing to look after her; he loved his grandchild, played "cuckoo" with her and "hide-and-seek," with which he had once enchanted Gertrude, but he sat in the damp hole of a cellar and Frida's cheeks lost their colour there visibly.

Now Maggie was to come to the Bahnstrasse to Frida during her mother's absence. But when Mina once came home unexpectedly early she found the pale girl at the open window, motionless, leaning far out, staring across spellbound to where behind the hoarding the entrance-gate to the Salvation Army could be seen.

Frida's frock was smouldering, unwatched she had come too near the glowing sparks from the fire. "Gracious, Maggie!" Only the loud scream of the terrified mother roused Maggie. Pale and without excusing herself she crept into a corner. Mina shuddered, she was obliged to think of Matilda, she no longer had the heart to leave the child alone in the flat with the girl.

Mrs. Reschke racked her brains seriously what she was to do with Maggie. She crept about like a shadow; she was always where she was not expected to be. When she was spoken to she

did not answer, she did not seem to hear, but when she thought she was alone she talked perpetually and sang strange songs in a piercing, monotonous rhythm.

Mother Reschke was not wanting in practical admonition. "None o' my children 'ave ever been whipped so much," she said. "She be weakly, an' I can't give 'er the dressing I'd like to. Afraid she be, but she don't better 'erself."

Maggie's heart still fluttered when she thought of the punishment she had had the morning after Arthur's wedding.

"I'll teach ye to shame me like that," her mother had screamed; she was in a bad temper and hit wherever her fist happened to fall.

And Maggie had fallen on her knees, and without attempting to shield her head with her arms had taken the blows unresistingly. She suffered without a sound, without a quiver of the eyelids, without a tear, with a rapt look.

Only when she wanted to slip out secretly as usual in the evening and her mother barred the way she resisted. In spite of her struggles her mother dragged her to the kitchen and locked her in. "Yer stays 'ere. I'll put a stop to yer goin's on with the Salvation Army!" Then she had moaned and tossed in her bed on the kitchen table in despair.

Maggie wasted away. She could not say herself what was the matter. Air—light—love! But she had always lived in a cellar.

Often she could not get up in the morning she felt so weak; her limbs were heavy as lead. Her whole body hurt her, her back, her chest—everything, everything.

Then she remained in bed without moving, her hands crossed on her breast and gazed fixedly at the dark, damp cellar-wall.

Her mother let her lie there—she was of no use anyhow—and sent Ella to her with a cup of coffee and a roll. But the coffee was the last in the coffee-pot, the grounds in it made the sick girl cough, and the crusty roll would not slip down the dry, parched throat.

So she ate nothing, but gazed fixedly at the dark, damp cellar-wall again—for hours—till her eyes closed from weakness.

And then she had dreams, marvellous dreams; half in sleeping, half waking. She heard voices, well-known voices, singing—

“Tell it Jesus!  
Thou hast never  
Such Friend and Brother.”

“Hallelujah!” She half raised herself in bed, and stretched out her arms longingly.

Lively clapping of hands mingled with the singing, stimulating music accompanied it, feet beat time—

“Through the pearly gate we enter in  
A holy, powerful band.”

Warm hands seized her cold ones, outstretched in longing; she felt she was marching with them, she was raised up—higher—higher—she soared in front of all.

The singing swelled louder and louder, became more and more irresistible. The gates of Heaven sprang open, the golden throne was seen from afar. “Hallelujah, saved, saved!” . . .

With a hoarse scream the startled girl sprang up, a fumbling hand had passed over her face.

“Now, Maggie, how are ye?”

It was her father. When her mother was fully occupied in the shop in front he came shuffling in. He could see nothing at all in the kitchen, which was still darker than the other rooms; he held out his hands in front of him and groped his way.

“’Ave ye pain anywheres?”

“No,” she breathed softly.

“Won’t ye get up then?”

“No.”

“The sun shines outside!”

She said no more. Then he drew a stool to her bedside and dropped down on it with a sigh.

So spring came. But only spring according to the almanac; in reality it was much more stormy than in winter. Rain, mixed with fine hail, fell, mercilessly beating down the first little forward leaves. The stoves were no longer heated, the people shivered in the houses and caught cold.

Mina with her body bent forward struggled against the sharp east wind in the morning. She went earlier and earlier to Miss Abercorn and tried to get away sooner; for when she had worked

till she was in a perspiration here so as to get through her duties as quickly as possible her real day's work began. Twice a week she went out charing, three times washing. The time she had missed in the morning she made up for in the evening; it was often going on for midnight when she came home from these distant places.

Then Arthur slept; but Frida lay in her cot with open eyes and at the sound of the well-known footstep gave a little sleepy, bleating cry. Then the mother took her child out of her bed, washed her, combed her hair, played with her and held her on her lap; she had no time for this by day.

The debt to the publican was paid, the furniture-dealer too got his payments punctually; Mina was proud not to owe anything to anybody. But how long would it remain so? Arthur grumbled about his situation as house-porter, and Miss Abercorn seemed dissatisfied. She seriously required that Mina should give up her charing and washing and devote herself to her as before.

“But only fifteen shillings a month, miss! I can't manage with fifteen!”

Miss Abercorn seemed not to understand Mina's hint. She even groaned over the much money that she paid her, and immediately after put her name down for twenty shillings in a collection for building a school for black children somewhere in Africa.

A whole sovereign! Mina could not get over it.

Old Mrs. Reschke had heard that Miss Abercorn was looking out secretly for somebody else. “But you'll see,” she said to her daughter-in-law, “I'll frighten 'em all away. She shan't get ne'er a one!”

Now Miss Abercorn talked of perhaps taking a servant. She would certainly get one for fifteen shillings a month, probably for much less. Mina was too honest to contradict her; certainly, and then she would not be so lonely, she would at least have some one always about her. But just this seemed to be what the old lady was afraid of.

It was a rough, windy evening, one of the last in March. At the young Reschkes', high up on the fifth floor, it was draughty.

Arthur sat by the little stove—Mina had been obliged to light

it—and yet he was cold, rubbed his hands, shivered and coughed. He was in a very bad temper, in a heavy, hopeless mood. He rested his elbows on his knees, pressed his hands against his temples and brooded gloomily. Mina had just come home from washing, exceptionally early to-day; her clothes were still damp, her hair hung loose from the steam, at every movement she gave out a smell of washing, a disagreeable odour of potash and soapsuds.

She spread the slices of bread; as she had received twopence-halfpenny from her employers instead of supper she could afford something extra to-day. The slices for her husband and the roll for the child she covered thickly with slices of sausage.

It was after nine, and she was very hungry. “There, Arthur!” Munching away with her mouth full, she pushed his portion over to him.

He pushed it back angrily. “Don’t want it. Every day bread and butter with sausage, or, for a change, bread and butter without sausage. No thank you!”

“But, Arthur, it’s good,” she said and took another large bite. “Yer likes it, Frida, don’t ye?”

The child, in a blue night-gown, made out of an old dimity dress of her mother’s, stretched out her little hands eagerly for more.

“D’ye see!” Mina laughed; she was in such good spirits to-day. Had not the lady where she washed given her an old chintz curtain; it would cut up into a beautiful summer frock for Frida, she might even get a pinafore out of it. She crouched happily on the floor by the child and chattered to her of the pretty frock—yellow, with red rings.

A groan from Arthur interrupted her. He had sprung up and stretched his arms above his head.

“I’ll not stand it, it’s a dog’s life!”

It sounded so bitter, so despairing that Mina left off eating. She got up, put down her bread and approached her husband.

“What is it, Arthur?” In vain she tried to put her hand on his shoulder, he shook it off with an exasperated gesture and thrust his ten fingers into his curly hair.

“House-porter, is that a place for me? Make up parcels, carry out parcels, be a pack-horse! A Jack-o’-all-trades, an’



never dare say a word. The manager's a young fellow—not much older than me—an' what he thinks o' himself! Never there early enough in the mornin', an' in the evenin' can never get away. An' then to the Potsdamerstrasse, an' then to Alexander-Platz, an' then out to Moabit, an' then half way to Hasenhaide. An' weather yer wouldn't send a dog out in. Wet to the skin—you can't hold an umbrella, you haven't got an arm free—boots in holes!" He gave a hollow cough.

"Are ye ill?" She looked into his face anxiously.

"No, but mad! I'll not go on with it. What? Ain't I as good as he? He's only been to a Grammar School. Haha! But he was born on the second floor, or p'r'aps even first floor; then yer somebody at once. No, I'll not go on with it, I've had enough. Let 'em find somebody else to send all over the place for fifteen shillings a week!"

"Didn't ye get fifteen shillings at Christmas? An' on the first o' April he'll give ye a rise of one-and-sixpence a week. Then we'll be quite well off."

"A shilling more, what's the good of that? Ain't enough to live or die on. An' when I think it'll always be like this—always!" He groaned again, dropped down on to his former seat and hid his face in his hands.

She remained standing before him. The child, frightened by the tone of her father's voice, began to cry. Mina was pale, her forehead contracted.

"You're in a bad humour, sleep on it first, Arthur! Then everythin' 'll look different. That comes from the rainy weather. When it's warm you'll see it'll all be better!"

She tried to encourage herself and him, but her tone was doubtful. "It'll all come right!"

"Never!" He shouted at her.

She had nothing more to say. His mood had infected her. She hung her head sadly.

And then the rain which the wind drove against the window! Her appetite was gone.

Arthur suddenly got up. "I'll just go down to Bartuschewski. P'r'aps he'll know of something for me. Something suitable an' decent! To-morrow's the latest if I'm going to give notice."

"You'll not?" Terrified she seized his arm. Her eyes got quite large with fright.

"Of course," he said, he was quite cool now and shook her off. Took his hat out of the wardrobe and went to the door whistling, his hands in his trousers-pockets.

She did not detain him; she knew him, nothing was to be done with him now; since the scene with the silver mug for the Bartuschewskis' baby she had had her experiences. No reproaches, not a single word! That irritated him, made him furious at once; afterwards he was sorry. He was just "nerfus" as his mother said.

She gazed after him with sad, misty eyes.

He give up his situation!

She fell heavily on to the nearest chair. Only now she felt how tired she was.

It was quiet in the room. Frida had gone to sleep and Mina's eyes closed from fatigue.

Had she sat there long? She awoke shivering. Oh, she still had her damp clothes on! There—a knock!

She blinked sleepily at the door. Who could it be? Not Arthur. And no one from the cellar either, they did not knock. Bartuschewskis? It could not be; they were still mortally angry with her, and never showed themselves up-stairs.

Again a knock, louder and more urgent.

Mina stumbled to her feet. "Come in!"

The door opened and Bertha fell into her arms.

What did she look like?

Wet through and through; the water ran out of her hair, her hat was ruined, her good dress splashed to the knees, the bottom flounce torn; she left a wet trail behind her.

Under her left arm she carried a large parcel, under her right a big cardboard box and a hat-box; the pockets of her dripping jacket were stuffed full. She could hardly stir.

With a sigh of relief she let everything drop to the floor. "Oh, it was heavy!"

Taking off her hat she swung it to and fro, the rain-drops fell from it in a shower. There was a pool at once where she had stood; the water ran out of her dainty low shoes.

Mina clasped her hands together. "Lor', where do ye come from?"

"Straight away from the lodgin's!" Bertha gave a shrill laugh; but then her face twitched, and, weeping loudly, she fell on her friend's neck.

"Goodness, Bertha, Bertha dear!" Terrified Mina tried to soothe the excited girl whose whole body trembled, and who was shaken by uncontrollable sobs.

"For goodness' sake, do say what's happened?" Mina tried to take off her wet jacket—how thin Bertha had become! She had not seen her since the wedding.

"Are ye ill? Bertha, lass, don't cry so, yer frightens me!"

"I'm done up!" With a deep sigh Bertha dropped on to a chair by the table, rested her arms on it, and wept on with deep, convulsive sobs.

Mina stood there quite perplexed and looked at the fair, tousled head and the narrow, twitching shoulders. What could it be? At last Mina thought of the only possible solution.

She pulled the weeping girl's sleeve. "Bertha," she whispered, with a mournful smile, "there's summat the matter with ye!"

Bertha raised her head. "Summat the matter?" And then she read in Mina's face what she meant, and began to laugh as violently as she had wept before. "Haha—summat the matter! Haha! Ain't so stupid as that! Haha!" She almost screamed with laughter.

"Well, then, why d'ye cry so?"

Clenching her little hand Bertha suddenly struck the table. "I won't always be a servant!" And now she suddenly began to weep again, and between her tears jerked out, "Is that a life for anybody? I ain't a dog, I must have some pleasure sometimes. I'll not drudge every day an' then be driven about from pillar to post."

"But it's your fault," Mina ventured to say. "Why don't ye stop in one place?"

"In one place—haha!—not in a hundred! I'm a rollin' stone, that's what I be. It's the same everywhere. A little better in one place, a little worse in another—allus the same. An' so it'll go on—ah!" She shuddered, and then clenched her teeth and

stared gloomily into the mournful light of the little lamp. "I'm not going on with it!"

"But what will ye do?"

"Don't know," the answer came back bitterly.

"Will ye go home?"

"To the village? Ain't so stupid. It's much too dull there."

"Well, then,"—Mina shrugged her shoulders, shook her head, and looked at her helplessly—"then I don't know what ye'll do!"

"Don't ye trouble," said Bertha lightly, sprang up, and put her dress to rights. "Summut 'll turn up!"

Her restless eyes wandered round the room, glanced at the scanty furniture, the bare walls, the remains of the poor supper. She breathed in the damp, steamy vapour that came from Mina's clothes, mingled with the strong smell of cabbage from dinner—the air of poor people's dwellings. She shuddered and turned pale. "It ain't particular grand here, Mina. It wouldn't suit me!"

Mina was not offended, but laughed good-naturedly. "Of course it ain't so fine as you've had it in your places. If we only have enough to eat," she added sighing, "I don't ask for more."

"Well, you don't ask for much." Bertha glanced at her friend compassionately, and then her eyes rested on the scraps left over from supper. Her upper lip twitched strangely. Then rallying herself, she sprang to her cardboard box, lifted it from the floor, and began hastily to untie it.

"A new dress—quite the fashion—you shall see. I couldn't wear anythin' decent in them shabby lodgin's, it would ha' been ruined in no time. An' the dirt! An' the shoes that I wore out on the stairs, it ain't to say! Always backwards an' forwards! They pulled at the bell so that I thought something was wrong. An' when I comes in—'Oh, pick that up, it's fallen down,' or, 'Look and see, I don't think the window is quite shut!'—Bah!" She put out her tongue. "An' the bugs there—brr! Look here!" She pushed up the sleeve of her blouse and showed red swollen places. "They have bitten me like this. They were thick in our bedroom."

“But why did ye leave the place?”

“Ain’t that enough? You do ask stupid!” Bertha stood with her arms akimbo, her eyes flashed. “D’ye want to hear more? Then I’ll tell yer how the gentlemen were after me. I was to come to their room, help ‘em to pack—the——” She swallowed down a not exactly complimentary expression. “An’ then not even a decent tip; some of them bolted. An’ then the old man, the master, the nonsense he talked! When I turned out the rooms he came after me—‘Here, Bertha, sew this button on for me!’ I know what that means! But when she began about the broken washing-jug: it had cost eighteen shillings and I was to pay for it—then I gave it her. ‘Let the master pay the eighteen shillings—it’s his fault: what does he want to pinch me for?’ Ye should ha’ seen her. Haha! I was turned out in no time. She’d keep my basket till she got the eighteen shillings—I don’t care!” She gave a little wicked laugh of delight: “I stole down the backstairs with my good things; as it is, I’ve got a lot at Mrs. Grummach’s—there are only a few old rags in the basket.”

“Yer beautiful things at Mrs. Grummach’s!” Mina was quite horrified.

“Yes, they’re gone!” Bertha laughed, but then suddenly bursting into tears she seized Mina’s hand. “Will ye keep me here till I’ve found something? You’ll not be saddled wi’ me long. Something ’ll turn up, an’ if I——” She left off weeping and laughed again flippantly. “I’ll not go to the bad, ye needn’t be afraid of that; I’ve too much sense—Trallalla, trallalla!”

However much Mina resisted, Bertha took her round the waist, and waltzed with her wildly through the room.

### XXX

NOTHING had been found for Bertha. What did she really want to do?

“Play the fine lady,” said Mother Reschke, with a malicious laugh. She had not had a good word for Bertha for a long time;

it was unheard of her saddling herself on the young couple in this way ; she had been there a week ! “ Couldn’t she come to me ? ”

But Bertha confessed to Mina that the state of her finances did not permit her to stay at Mother Reschke’s. “ I’m not stingy ; when I’ve got money I like to spend it. But now I haven’t got it ; she’d take my last farthing.”

And so they managed in the one room.

Arthur had gallantly given up his share of the bed to the visitor, and slept behind the wardrobe on a mattress borrowed from a neighbour.

While Mina, after her hard day’s work, slept the dreamless sleep of deep fatigue, Bertha lay with open eyes and stared at the moon which shone in palely through the curtainless window. It lit up the poverty inside. Bertha’s eyes became larger and larger, she looked anxious, almost terrified. She closed the lids tightly and uttered a sigh ; from the corner, behind the wardrobe, another sigh answered. Arthur tossed about on his mattress in restless dissatisfaction.

By day Bertha was in good spirits. Then she sewed a little, crocheted a little, yawned a little and went for a stroll with Frida. Mina was at work now every day, she had to earn for two—Arthur was out of a place. His employer had dismissed him before he could give notice. Was that right to throw an industrious workman out of employment ? In the public-house he always found a circle of sympathizing companions in misfortune.

It was really enough to make one lose all wish to look after a new occupation ! Only Mina’s constant entreaties induced Arthur to seek for work.

He went out every day, remained away hours and hours, sauntered slowly along the pavement, stood before a shop window with his hands in his trousers-pockets, or inspected the work at some new building. Everywhere there was something to be seen, something to pass an opinion upon. Here a tram-car had left the rails, there a horse fallen ; here they were working at the drainage, there a drunken man was taken into custody by a policeman. Arthur was always in the middle of any crowd that collected.

He sat a good deal with his mother, too, in the shop in front. He did not go to the sitting-room at the back, his father was there; the old man bored him since he had taken a liking to his daughter-in-law. Every word he said in Mina's praise irritated Arthur.

He was not exactly agreeable when Mina came home, worn out with her work. What did she look like? A regular "gawk!" He glanced quickly at Bertha, mentally comparing the two—how lively, how dainty! Every one of her gentle, swaying movements her roguish smile, her cool and yet speaking glance, everything about her attracted him.

To-day he had sat in the public-house from six till ten; his head was hot when he came home. Bertha was still alone; his eyes blazed. She sat at the table, had some needlework before her, but did nothing. Yawning, she blinked at the light. He went behind her quickly, seized her round the waist, and pressed a glowing kiss on the nape of her neck, just where the golden hair lay like soft down. But quicker than thought she turned round, and gave him a sounding box on the ears.

At that moment Mina came in. She turned very pale; she said nothing, only uttered a sigh as she bent to take the wet stockings off her feet. She had not been well the whole day, so tired and giddy, and now she had a feeling of oppression on her chest.

Next morning she was still pale and quiet; then Bertha whispered into her ear: "Yer needn't be uneasy, Mina; they're all like that. Arthur's not anythin' like as bad as many. You'll get rid o' me now. I'm going to look for a place to-day!"

A faint smile passed over Mina's grave face, and for a moment smoothed the lines on her forehead.

As Mina went down-stairs to work a noise came up from the court, of chairs being overturned, crockery broken, loud abuse, screams of a woman and children. Oh dear, that came from the Bartuschewskis again! And they had left their window open, too.

Mina stopped and listened, pressing her hand against her beating heart. No, her Arthur was not like that. Bertha was right—Arthur was not at all one of the worst. If only he had a place again, then everything would be right!

She could think of nothing else the whole day: if he only had a

place! The wish seemed to have taken possession of her. Her thoughts were not with her work. The mistress whose drawing-room she cleaned was not at all in the wrong when she complained of the charwoman to-day. Had she not in her absentmindedness lifted a vase from the mantelpiece just where the vase was cemented? and, of course, the piece had broken off again!

It was a sad day for Mina.

It had not been a lively one for Bertha either.

For hours she had stood in the dark waiting-room of the registry office in the Jägerstrasse. She had gone to this one, in spite of the distance, because it was cheap, at every time there was a demand and supply there, and because a kind of longing—an instinctive impulse—drew her again and again to the neighbourhood of the Friederichstrasse, where the blood of the great town pulsates more quickly, the shop windows are more brilliant and enticing, the electric lights of the restaurants shine upon the motley crowd on the pavements till late in the night.

In her coquettishly simple dress Bertha stood in full view just at the entrance of the registry office. This place had been assigned to her as a decoy bird. She was ashamed, and bit her lips—had she not come down in the world to stand here? With what scorn she had once looked at the girls who had sought a place from here—it was not good form at all.

But she soon raised her lowered lids; she noticed that she pleased. Not one lady passed without looking at her. She was scrutinized, and scrutinized the people again.

The manageress called her again and again to introduce her. "You're looking for a parlour-maid—here, madam! Just what you want!—smart, neat, handy—a servant for a good house! Now, then, you speak to the lady! Sixteen pounds, not less? Oh, you'll soon come to an understanding!"

The gentleman, too, who seemed to have the whole affair under him, and with an eagle eye surveyed comers and goers, seekers and finders, especially favoured Bertha.

The girls right and left, awkward-looking and with snub noses, were quite unheeded; Bertha had to show her book again and again to old and young, tall and short, stout and thin, gentlemen and ladies. But she soon became cross; it led to nothing. Those



who had looked at her so attentively drew a long face when they had seen her book, and retired, although Bertha's patron declared, "A written character says nothing, madam, and that you know as well as I!"

Only a stout man in a fluffy greatcoat, and a greasy, shiny hat, held his ground. When he read the character his puffy lips smiled strangely, he grinned and smacked his lips.

"I want a general servant," he said familiarly to Bertha; went up close to her and examined her approvingly with an experienced glance of his little eyes. "Not much work. You don't need to cook; I've a professed cook for that. We live up-stairs, but we take our meals down-stairs. I'll send up your meals, or, better still, you come down an' fetch 'em yourself, an' then you can look about you a bit an' see what it's like down there."

The manager, who seemed to know the stout man, now took part in the conversation. "That's a place that'll just suit you. Mr. Lehmann has a splendid business. Does well, don't it?" Laughing, he clapped him on the shoulder, and the stout man made a smacking noise again. Mr. Lehmann has a first-class restaurant close by. He only employs waitresses. Frequented neighbourhood. Lehmann, you'll give sixteen pounds, won't you?"

The two men exchanged a quick look. Lehmann nodded. "I'll give it." And then his cunning eyes again scrutinized the pretty, girlish figure.

Bertha did not say a word. Restaurant with waitresses! Had she heard right? She wrinkled her forehead, and became red and pale by turns. But sixteen pounds! Now she opened her mouth, now she shut it again. She bit her lips undecidedly.

"Now, then," urged Mr. Lehmann, "how is it? Make up your mind! You'll have nothing to put up with if you come to me. You're nearly always alone up-stairs; my wife's at the buffet. An' if you find it dull up-stairs, you can come down a bit. Eh?" He smiled again familiarly and came still closer. "P'r'aps you'll like it down-stairs; there's always something on. You see if you don't make your fortune with us!"

Bertha stared at him. Her eyes opened wider and wider. She no longer saw the fat, oily face—she looked into the far distance, farther and farther. An endless perspective opened out before

her—little work, much amusement—— Her nostrils dilated, the blood rushed to her head, her little tongue licked her reddened lips longingly—little work, much amusement—But—but—— Involuntarily she stepped back a pace ; a shudder passed through her frame. Her fixed gaze relaxed ; she looked scornfully at the stout man.

“No,” she said without any respect in her tone, throwing back her head and drawing down the corners of her mouth. “Restaurant—with waitresses—— Yer must look elsewhere. It ain’t for me !”

She turned away ; words seemed wasted on her. Mr. Lehmann had to retire.

Bertha remained alone, but she stood there with a moody expression. She was tired and overstrained, and had become indifferent to all the scrutinizing looks.

The hall seemed to go round with her ; it was badly ventilated and reeked of the fusty clothes, the soap and pomatum of those seeking for employment ; the smell of cigars which clung to the men, and the perfume of the many ladies, together with the dust and the general smell of humanity. She put her hands to her head. Her staring eyes saw nothing but a grey mist, through which flashed the uncertain light of the dimly burning jets of gas.

It was hot, more than full. And people still came—backwards and forwards, in and out. And the girls still stood in long rows, leaning wearily against the whitewashed walls. And mistresses still walked up and down examining the rows. There was a perpetual humming and buzzing, only interrupted by the shrill voices of those in charge.

“General servant wanted ! General servant—twelve pounds !”

A slight figure detached itself from the wall and came forward reluctantly.

“Cook ! A cook wanted ! Sixteen pounds ! Seventeen pounds !”

“Here !”

“Nurse ! Eight pounds ! A nurse ! Are there none here ?”

Nobody stirred ; none of the girls came forward.

“Nurse ! A nurse ! Eight pounds !”

Suppressed laughter ran through the rows ; the figures along the walls nudged each other and turned up their noses.

"A nurse! Eight pounds!"

"Not me," replied a bold voice from somewhere. And the suppressed laughter became louder.

The air in the hall became more and more oppressive. An irritating feeling of restlessness came over Bertha; she twitched nervously at her book. Should she go or should she stay? She had been standing here since four o'clock, and now it was going on for eight! Looking up gloomily, she advanced to the door.

Somebody pulled her sleeve.

"Is it really you?" A pale, slight, fair girl made her way out by Bertha's side. "Are ye goin'? I'm goin' too. There ain't nobody here to-day—flat as ditchwater! Don't ye know me? You remember me in the Reschkes' cellar? An' Sundays at Halensee? I walked out with one of the Maikäfer then. An' you 'ad a big fellow with a black muzzle that always danced with ye!"

Now it flashed across Bertha who it was. Dr. Ehrlich's Minnie! She had scarcely recognized her with the deep holes in her cheeks; she had lost some teeth, too; in the front were badly-set false ones. Her clothes had no longer their former ladylike appearance which had once excited the envy of the whole of the Göbenstrasse.

Minnie seemed to understand the meaning of Bertha's astonished gaze. "'Ave 'ad bad luck," she said hoarsely, and gave a dry cough. "Was a long time ill. An' how are you?" Her eyes looked keenly and curiously at her. "Nothing special, eh? Or else we wouldn't meet 'ere!"

Bertha's vanity was wounded. "Me?" she said quickly. "Splendid! Couldn't be better. I ain't goin' to take a place at present; I'm stayin' with my cousin who's married well, an' she won't let me go. Only for a friend, no, I reelly only came out of curiosity, wanted to see wot it was like. Ah!" she fanned her hot face with her handkerchief. "Nothin' for me!"

The other laughed incredulously. "You're so well off? Yer don't say so! Well, you're all right then!" She slipped her thin arm under Bertha's.

They pushed their way out through the men who lined the entrance to the registry office. Bertha's pretty face was stared at;

there—her arm twitched in Minnie's—there was the stout man again. His puffy lips smiled familiarly; he recognized her.

She ran hastily across the pavement.

“Wot's the matter? Wot are you runnin' so for?” panted Minnie, clinging more tightly to her arm. “I'm out of breath!”

Bertha looked round timidly—nobody was following her. And then she walked more slowly.

Minnie rattled on without a pause. “'Ow glad I am to see you, Bertha! Those were fine times we 'ad once! D'ye remember Augusta who was so respectable? A false lot she were! On'y to think of it. . . . She made a pretty penny, you can take your oath on that, an' left the lawyer in the Jägerstrasse after they'd 'ad no end of a row; an' now wot d'ye think? Gets a place with a rich old man. She'll 'ave taken him in proper with her respectability—'don't come near me, I'm chockfull o' virtue.' Yes, indeed! An' wot d'ye think, now he marries 'er!”

She expected an outburst of astonishment from Bertha, but she remained silent.

“Well, wot d'ye say to that? Enough to turn you up, ain't it? When I 'eard it I wanted to go to the old fellow, an' 'lighten 'im about his respectable Augusta. An' then I thought, who knows, if you mayn't want 'er, you keep still! But isn't it an injustice? If you're honest an' decent, you remain a poor thing, an' are pushed about everywhere, an' the others sits in clover.”

“Yes,” said Bertha roughly.

“Bertha, we're such old friends, couldn't you lend me five shillings? If you're so well off, it won't be nothin' to you—a trumpery five shillings! The landlady at the lodgin'-'ouse 'll turn me out if I haven't got it.”

Bertha hesitated; what should she say? Poor thing! So miserable, so starved! But she had not five shillings herself!

Minnie complained, “There's nothin' doin'! There's mis-tresses an' mistresses, but they ain't worth anythin'! My last place was quite a good one!—fifteen pounds a year, tips often, good food, comfortable bed in a comfortable room, a bottle o' beer every evenin' an' at dinner too; I stuck out for that. In the dinin'-room they drank wine. But you'll not believe it,” she stood still and held Bertha by a button of her jacket, “the missus

always asked me where I was going when I went out evenings! An' wouldn't give me the key—did ye ever hear of such a thing? Wot is it to 'er where I go? No, that wasn't for me—so good-bye!" She sighed. "It all comes from my bad luck! Bertha, what about my five shillings? Out with them!"

How should she get rid of her? Bertha looked round restlessly. Was there no help anywhere?

There—steps! Tramp, tramp—they came quickly behind them. She turned round and started back with nervous terror—the stout man!

He was already close to her; all at once she felt weak, spell-bound.

"Well, miss," said Mr. Lehmann, and touched his hat. "How is it? Thought better of it, eh?" He made a pause and looked at her in the lamplight with eyes that measured her from head to foot.

"No cooking, only rooms to clean, and light housework! An' sixteen pounds!"

Minnie pinched her arm with a low scream, "Lucky girl!"

But Bertha, as if awaking out of a stupor, shook her off. Without saying good-bye, without a word, she rushed away, round the nearest corner, and into the midst of the crowd in the Friedrich-strasse where she was soon hidden from sight.

Pale, exhausted, and with eyes red with crying, she arrived home.

The couple sat at a festive meal. A pickled herring with slices of onion and fried potatoes scented the room. Arthur had a piece of bread and cheese before him, which he was spreading thickly with French mustard.

And something of festive joy, too, filled the room. Even the little lamp burned brighter. Many lines seemed gone from Mina's face, a gleam of happiness made her young again. With beaming eyes she looked at her husband and once stroked his sleeve furtively. She laughed gaily at Frida who stood on tiptoe, and with greasy little hands tried to reach something on the table.

"Arthur has a place," Mina called out exultantly to Bertha.

"Has he? Nothing else!" Without further question, spiritless

and exhausted, the girl sat down by the table and rested her head on her hand.

“Yes, indeed,” said Arthur proudly, and drew himself up. “But I’ve given myself no little trouble about it. At the public-house I got to know a fellow out of the printing-office in the Lützowstrasse, and he says, ‘They’ve so much to do they’re taking on hands. You go and see,’ he says. At first I wouldn’t—what, offer myself? They beat you down at once. But after all I went. And now,” he put on an air of consequence, “now I’m in the service of the firm Gutzzeit & Co. Eighteen shillings a week—quite good, ain’t it? Mina, go down and fetch me another pot of beer. In time one gets on, and books were always what I liked.”

“If they only don’t send ye away when there’s not so much work,” said Mina, anxious again, and the fold between her eyebrows was there once more. “You’re only put on for a time.”

“Put on for a time! Nonsense! They’ll take care not to send me away. It ain’t so easy to get an educated person! He’s quite different to a common fellow!”

Arthur was on the high horse to-day. He had not been in such good spirits for a long time, and since their marriage had never been so amiable to his wife. He teased her, patted her cheek, and called her his “old woman.” He lifted Frida on to his shoulder and hopped about in the room with her, and the child, unaccustomed to such pleasure, screamed with delight, and tugged at her father’s hair.

He whistled and sang till the people on the floor below knocked loudly with a stick against the ceiling.

In the middle of all this joy which had found its way in like a rare sunbeam into a long-closed room Bertha sat without part or lot.

Her brows were knit, her lips curled contemptuously, a new place and three shillings more a week—was it worth while!

And then a trembling, tortured sigh escaped her breast.

## XXXI

THE first thunderstorm of spring had come down. At noon the sun beat on the asphalt; its burning rays were like piercing darts. Whoever could sought the shade. Now, in the evening, when the sun had long crept behind heavy clouds, it was icy cold again. The warmth seemed to have disappeared with the thunder and lightning; a rainy, dark night brooded over the streets.

Maggie crouched on the bench in the kitchen. She had been ill the whole day. In the early morning her heart had beat as wildly as if it would burst her breast; a perpetual trembling passed through her; her limbs, heavy and weak, would not obey her. At last she had sunk down on the bed on the kitchen table; had lain there for hours in a state of dull torpor, and at the first clap of thunder had hidden her head in the pillow trembling and terrified.

“Think of eternity! Thou must die!”

These words which adorned the walls of the Salvation Army hall in flaming red had never appeared more flaming. She read them in every flash that shot across the night of the cellar; she heard them in every thunder-clap that crashed above the noise of the street.

Weeping, praying, trembling, she lay in the impenetrable darkness. At every flash, at every peal of thunder, her poor body twitched; sighs of terror escaped from her pale lips, feverish heat and shivering cold possessed her. She was afraid—to-day, now in this moment—the day of judgment would come! She was afraid, oh, not for herself!

An irresistible impulse drove her to her family. When her mother happened to come into the kitchen she caught at her dress. “Moth-er!”

“Yes, wot d’ye want? Are ye afraid? ’Orrible weather! Not a soul ’ll come into the shop now; won’t venture out. An’ there I sits with all the spinach an’ sticks o’ rhubarb. That do come down! Leave orf!” She shook her fist towards the ceiling.

“Mother!” That was a horrified cry, but Mrs. Reschke did not hear it; she had left the kitchen grumbling loudly. When the thunder had died away Maggie felt better.

Now she had been sitting on the bench for a long time, listening to the monotonous splashing of the rain. The splashing sounded like a cradle-song, so gentle, so soothing, always the same melody—softly, softly, the lonely girl’s eyes closed.

Maggie did not sleep; she only dreamed. . . .

Hark, music of the Salvation Army! Rejoicing voices of saved ones! They stream through the pearly gate in garments white as snow; all stains wiped out; all guilt, shame, and sorrow washed away in the glorious stream of salvation.

And the chosen ones who stand before the throne smile and beckon: “Hallelujah, there is victory for you! Save your soul; save souls, save, save!”

“Oh!” . . . Maggie stretched out her hands in the darkness of the kitchen; she would save souls, how willingly, oh, how willingly! If they would only believe her! If she might tell “the wonderful story of Jesus and His glory!”

Resolved, and full of an enthusiasm which made her bold, she got up. The door opened; Mother Reschke appeared with Ella, a little lamp in her hand. “Now then, still in the dark, old owl?” It was intended for a joke, but the rough voice jarred upon the girl and startled her.

“’Ere’s a light. An’ now make a fire an’ warm wot’s left over from dinner for father. An’ you can give ’im a herring, too; one from the top o’ the stone jar. They must be eaten. An’ you can take ’alf a one for yourself. I’m goin’ out with Ella a bit.”

Now Maggie saw Ella was dressed in her best.

“I’m to sing,” cried the child proudly, and twirled round. “There’s a birthday-party at the greengrocer’s up the street. At school I always lead; none of ’em can sing as well as me.”

“That I believe!” Mother Reschke stroked the wavy, fair hair of the youngest. “Very gen’rous of ’em to ask us, considerin’ we’re rivals. But it’s only on account o’ Ella. Well, you’ll make ’em sit up!”

“Mother!” With sudden resolution Maggie seized her mother’s arm; her waxen cheeks glowed. “Mother!” she brought out



with great exertion, while her eyes mutely entreated, "I—can—sing—something—nice—too!"

"You're crazy! They wouldn't understand you!"

Ella giggled.

All the light went out of Maggie's eyes, the colour from her face; she timidly drew away her hand from her mother's arm; all her courage was gone. Tears rushed to her eyes; she shrank back a few paces.

"Don't be so envious!" Mrs. Reschke was in a good humour this evening with the prospect of the birthday-party, and passed her hand over Maggie's head too. "'Ow straight your 'air is compared to Ella's. Well, good-bye, Maggie!"

They went. Maggie and her father were alone in the cellar.

The old man sat in the sofa-corner behind the lamp, which was covered with a newspaper, and brooded silently before him. When Maggie crept in and softly pushed the plate of food in front of him, a friendly gleam passed over his stubbly face. "Are you there, Gertie?"

Maggie nestled up to him. "Father!"

"Oh, it's you," he said, disappointed, starting out of his dreams. "Sit 'e down, child, an' eat!"

But Maggie could not eat. When the light left her father's face at the sound of her voice, her heart contracted painfully. Without a word she slipped out through the glass door, into the empty shop, behind the great mangle. There she hid her face in her hands and wept.

Outside, the rain splashed, monotonously, soothingly; here, in the shop, she could understand its music still better. It became a song, then a full chorus of voices of the blessed—

"Through the pearly gate we enter in,  
A holy, powerful band."

Maggie started up, and glanced at the dark walls; no, she could not remain here, she must go to those who were singing! To those who conquer, who enter in through the pearly gate! Away from the desolate, gloomy cellar, where she was despised, to glory!

She looked round timidly, crept back to the glass door on

tiptoe, and listened. Her father was sleeping in the sofa-corner as he did every evening ; she heard him snore.

Nobody here detained her. Away, away !

She had enough sense to pick up a shawl, which had been thrown down carelessly, and put it round her shoulders. Then she slipped out.

She stormed up the cellar-steps, springing over the one step with the tell-tale bell. All at once she had strength ; she felt quite well.

Outside there was pouring rain.

The trumpeter before the barracks in the neighbouring Grossgörschenstrasse was blowing, "To bed—to bed !"

So late ! She ran faster.

She had never taken so little time to get to the Bahnstrasse ; there was the wooden paling already ! She panted along it against the wind and rain, which took away her breath. Only quickly, quickly !

But now she could no longer get along so fast ; the wooden paling never seemed to come to an end ; there, a dim lantern, flickering in the wind, scarcely showed the little entrance-gate.

She stumbled hastily through it and against somebody coming out, a female figure in the Salvation Army dress.

"Are they still singing ?" gasped Maggie.

"Over," said the Salvation Army soldier. "The meeting was out early to-day."

"Oh !" Maggie gave a grievous cry of disappointment, and staggered back against the lamp-post.

"Come to-morrow, you are welcome at any time," said the Salvation Army soldier winningly.

"Oh, Lieutenant Naomi !" Now Maggie recognized the speaker. "Lieutenant Naomi, do—you still—know me ?"

"Hallelujah, is it you, Margaret ?" The fair young face of the Salvation Army soldier, who had taken the part of the angel in the performance, lit up with a smile.

"We have missed you very much. Hallelujah !" She put her arms round Maggie and kissed her on the mouth.

They had missed her ! Overwhelming joy entered Maggie's hungry heart. In the lamplight she saw the mild, blue eye of the

angel upon her, she clasped her arm with both hands. "Let me—stay with you! Oh, let me!"

"Come with me," said the angel in a gentle, half-singing cadence, "I am going out to save souls."

The Salvation Army soldier carried under her arm a whole packet of *War-cries*, which she carefully protected from the rain with her cloak. "It's bad weather to-day, the restaurants will fill early. May Jesus give me grace to arouse many—I will wander unweariedly."

She spoke simply and cheerfully as if it were nothing to go from door to door, from tavern to dining-rooms, from the smoky public-house to the smartest restaurant, and this hour after hour, till long past midnight, till towards the grey dawn of morning.

"How cold you are," she said, and drew the shivering Maggie's arm closer through her own. "But you will soon feel cold no more, the victory is with us!"

"Oh, we loud Hallelujahs sing  
As we march to Zion,"

she began to sing in an undertone. Her feet moved to the time of a march.

Maggie joined in the singing with her weak voice.

So they went out arm in arm, to save souls.

The vaporous veil of the rainy night enveloped them. They marched bravely, the lonelier streets soon lay behind them, they came nearer and nearer to the frequented parts, the rows of lights, the electric lamps which shone brightest before the restaurants.

The distance had not tired Maggie, reviving strength flowed from her companion to her. She felt herself borne along, buoyed up by quiet enthusiasm. She marched with uncovered hair, her forehead exposed to the rain. Hallelujah, as we march to Zion!

Lieutenant Naomi went into the first restaurant, Maggie followed at her heels. But she did not push her way between the tables with her; she remained standing not far from the door, with her eyes fixed on the slender figure in the poke-bonnet, winding through the smoke-enveloped crowd in the hall.

Many noticed the pale girl leaning motionless by the door, with a rapt expression in her great eyes. What did she want?

The waiter, who scarcely looked at her in the hurry and bustle of his work, shrugged his shoulders. She would probably beg, or sell wax vestas.

"It's not allowed," he called to Maggie, and waved his dinner-napkin for her to go away.

She did not move.

And so they went from one restaurant to another, from one public-house to another. Lieutenant Naomi had not had much success yet, but she smiled. She smiled at every rude joke addressed to her, at every mocking word that replied to her offering of the *War-cry*. The bright light in her eyes was not clouded. "Jesus gives grace, this evening, this hour! Hallelujah!"

Maggie leant more heavily on the arm of her companion; she was tired now, and when Lieutenant Naomi began to hum again—

"Oh, we loud Hallelujahs sing,  
As we march to Zion!"

she did not join in. She breathed heavily. There was an oppression on her chest.

Midnight was long past. Maggie had got over her tiredness now, she did not think of home; like a departed spirit, released from all that was earthly, she wandered through the night.

Now they entered a restaurant which was more elegant than any they had been in before. Much gilding and palms and velvet divans, and enormous mirrors which reflected the light of hundreds of little flames on their polished surface. Before deep niches hung velvet curtains which were drawn back here and there and disclosed elegant-looking couples behind laid tables.

The porter, in a long red coat with a cocked hat and gilt stick, wished to prevent the Salvation Army soldier coming in, but she pushed him aside with unruffled serenity, and Maggie followed her.

Here and there a burst of laughter was heard at the sight of the poke-bonnet. But the beautiful face under it disarmed the mockery of many. Now other remarks were made; but of whatever nature they were the fair eyelashes did not quiver.

Some fashionably-dressed young men sitting at a table bought

a whole pack of *War-cries* at once. They would like to be saved. The Salvation Army soldier; as if she had not noticed the mockery, invited them pleasantly to the next meeting.

Now she approached one of the niches in the background, with a firm hand she pushed back the curtain.

Laughter, men's laughter, and now a woman's laugh. It rang through the whole hall as far as Maggie at the door.

That laugh—that laugh!—Maggie's big eyes became still bigger, she stretched her head forward listening.

That laugh—that laugh! Who was it laughed like that—a little high, a little sharp, with a trill in it like a canary? Who?

Involuntarily Maggie moved forward step by step; with trembling fingers she smoothed back the wet hair which hung over her eyes. Who was laughing there?

She looked: there was a table laid for supper and covered with glasses and bottles; two gentlemen with very flushed faces sat at it, and between them a—a—a lady!

She leant against one of the gentlemen and blinked at the other who was leaning over her.

A white hat trimmed with many conspicuous feathers was pushed quite back from her face. Now she rested both elbows on the table, looked at the Salvation Army soldier with tired, black-rimmed eyes and laughed. And now she yawned and showed all her dazzling white teeth.

Maggie suppressed a cry; she bent quite forward, breathed loudly and agitatedly—was it not—was it not?

Like a vision the picture of her sister suddenly rose before her over-excited senses. She laughed like that. She had yawned like that early in the morning when, waiting for the curling-tongs to get hot, she had rested her arms on the edge of the kitchen stove and gazed sleepily into the little kitchen lamp.

No, it could not be Gertrude—oh no! She had had brown hair, and this was brilliant golden, with a metallic lustre.

A pang shot through Maggie's heart, a convulsive tremor ran through her body. She no longer felt firm ground under her feet; it went up and down, changed into mist. Around her the lighted hall was also enveloped in mist. Near, and yet far, quite far, the picture of her sister; vague as a shadow, fleeting as a memory.

No more resemblance between that splendid person there and Gertrude's slender, girlish figure. And yet——!

Maggie staggered forward, striking against the chairs as if she were blind; she would go to her, would take hold of her silk dress, speak to her, call, scream, "Save, save your soul!" . . .

A hoarse sound escaped from Maggie's pale lips, the attention of those sitting near was attracted, they turned round; a waiter hastened up to her. Then she fled frightened.

As quick as lightning she was at the door—hark—the laugh again! She hesitated some seconds. No, Gertrude had never laughed like that, so loudly, so impudently!

She stumbled over the threshold and now she was outside. With a puzzled gesture she put her hand to her forehead—what, what was it? What had happened?

Holding her head with both hands she rushed madly away into the dark night. . . .

When Mother Reschke came home with Ella in good spirits from the birthday-party about half-past one in the morning she found Maggie cowering in a corner behind the blue varnished door.

"I were struck all of a 'eap," she said next day. "Sits there, wet through an' through an' quite daft. Not a word to be got out of 'er, not one—why didn't ye look arter her better?" she interrupted herself to scream at her husband. "You were snoozin' the 'ole evenin', I'll be bound. Didn't I forbid 'er goin' to the Salvation Army? O' course she's been there; they'll make 'er quite crazy. O Lor', it's nought but trouble with the children! An' now we'll 'ave to send for the doctor; as if that didn't cost nothin'. There's no end to the money we 'ave to pay!"

Maggie lay in her bed on the kitchen table in high fever. She generally lay quiet with closed eyes. But there were hours when she tossed about in wild delirium. She recognized nothing, nobody; everything seemed obliterated in her poor, confused brain, every memory wiped out. Only one picture rose before her cruelly distinct: Gertrude! And she was not saved!

Then she screamed, so piercingly, so heartrendingly, that the cellar-walls reverberated.

Every one who came into the shop was brought by Mother

Reschke to the sick-bed. Everybody gave different advice. With wide-open, curious eyes the visitors stood round the miserable pallet. This staring and touching and furtive whispering increased the restlessness of the sufferer. At every jangle and twang of the bell she started up; the shop was regularly stormed to-day.

Should they fetch a doctor or not? Oh, she would get better without. "I've no opinion o' quackery," said Mrs Reschke. And so she made some strong peppermint tea, that made the patient perspire and drove out the illness.

Mina came in the evening; dismayed she stood by the bed, and looked down compassionately on the emaciated body which was sharply outlined under the thin counterpane. She bent over her. "Maggie," she said gently.

But the girl gave no sign of recognition and did not stir, only the flat, undeveloped breast rose and fell with her hurried breathing.

Then Mina went away again treading heavily—she had no time to spare—and took her mother-in-law behind the door with her. There they had a long conversation. Mina's head was full of the idea of Bertha's going to Miss Abercorn; what did her mother-in-law think of it? She herself would give up the place; now that Arthur was earning such good wages she need not work quite so hard. It was rather too much for her, too, in the long run, as she said in rather an embarrassed tone, first to go to Miss Abercorn and then to wash the whole day after. Should she speak to the lady about it?

"In course!" Mrs. Reschke quite agreed. "If you can only get rid of 'er! Is that right to saddle 'erself on you for so long? Only let Bertha come to me! She ain't worth nothin', nothin' at all. 'Aven't I got 'er the best places? An' got no thanks for't! She shall 'ear wot I thinks of her—such a lazybones, such a picker an' stealer, such a——"

"Hush, quiet!"

Mother Reschke had got so loud that Father Reschke put his head through the crack of the kitchen door. "Hush, be quiet! It makes Maggie restless."

"Yes, yes. Can't open one's mouth in one's own 'ouse. I'm going!"

Now it was quiet, the coming and going had ceased at last. Night was drawing on.

Old Reschke sat quite alone with the sick girl. He had taken her thin hand in his, was bending over her with his spectacles pushed back on his forehead, and tried to examine her features by the dim light of the little lamp.

She looked him full in the face. "Father," she breathed weakly, "Gertrude——!" and began to weep.

And the stolid old man began to weep too, he did not really know why; laid his stubby cheek on the pillow by her, and sobbed with her, "Gertrude!"

### XXXII

MINA had scarcely ever talked so much as when she recommended Bertha to Miss Abercorn as a servant.

"You don't need be afraid o' her, she's from my home. An' even if Bertha ain't got good characters from her last places, she'll take all the more pains."

And Bertha, when Mina introduced her, cast down her eyes, and wore her hair as smoothly parted as when she came from the village to town.

At least she was no designing person and she looked gentle. That and Mina's frank assurance helped Miss Abercorn to overcome her dread of taking a second person into her solitary household; she decided after long hesitation to engage Bertha. But she would not give more than eleven pounds a year. "A girl with such bad characters to expect higher wages!" She haggled over every penny; the lady was not to be persuaded to give more than eleven pounds, though Mina talked to her as if she were an obstinate goat.

Bertha stood by and did not say a word; she persistently kept her eyes on the ground.

Mina beamed at having carried her point although Bertha did not enter upon her situation with especial pleasure. But it was



no use, she would get accustomed to it, and the old lady was not so bad if you knew how to take her. Of course Mina did not say she was glad not to have to feed her friend any longer. Mother Reschke did that very thoroughly; they had a great "row," and after that she and Bertha were mortal enemies.

At first Bertha was willing and obliging in her new place; she saw that she must not change again so soon. The lady, too, did not interfere with her work, left her unmolested in her kitchen and generally sat quietly in the sitting-room at the big, old-fashioned writing-table with the many drawers. There was not a sound, not a word to be heard in the whole flat; only the monotonous ticking of the clock broke the silence.

The quiet did Bertha good at first, after her stormy periods of service in which she had hardly had a moment for herself. Her hasty movements became more composed; her nerves, from staying up late at night, from the fatiguing work of the day, from constantly being on the defensive, had taken to quiver perpetually like the vibrating strings of a musical instrument; here they gradually calmed down.

But it was not long before the quiet of her surroundings, which had at first benefited her, made her depressed. Bertha had never yawned so much in her life as in the lonely kitchen here; she could really endure better being up night after night till the grey dawn. The tedium of her life oppressed her like a nightmare.

Day by day she began to suffer more from the silence. If she could only have got out oftener! But it was Miss Abercorn's custom to make most of her purchases herself; with her shabby leather bag on her arm she flitted through the streets, towards dark, like a bat and looked out for bargains.

The food was very simple and barely sufficient. At first Bertha, who was famished after her stay of some weeks with Mina and her own lack of money, tried to like the slender fare; but she had hardly received her first month's wages before, according to her old custom, she emptied the contents of her plate into the ash-bucket and covered it with ashes. She had a horror of the slices of bread and butter which the old lady herself spread for her in the dining-room; she always saw the bony fingers laying the slices of sausage on them. She shuddered with disgust.

Behind the coal-box, in the kitchen, she had arranged a little private store-room ; there she kept what she happened to have a hankering after, slabs of chocolate, a paper bag of sweets, goose-berry tarts, puffs with whipped cream inside, and so on. A bottle of sweet liqueur was also hidden there.

The evenings were so lonely. At eight o'clock Miss Abercorn locked the door which led to the back-stairs herself, pushed the bolt and took the key into the sitting-room with her. There was no possibility of slipping down for a chat outside the door. Bertha felt like a prisoner. She had long got out of the way of sitting down quietly to sew, it had never been a favourite amusement of hers either ; now her fingers were not at all fit for it.

And so she sat idly at the kitchen table ; the quiet was enough to drive her mad if it had not been for the sweet liqueur ! She took a sip now and again till an agreeable sensation of flying came over her, a feeling of release ; she had escaped from her surroundings. No more silence of death, no more loneliness—a light veil fell over her thoughts, roses bloomed upon her cheeks, her mouth smiled.

One day Mina came up for a few moments. "Why, lass," she said reproachfully, "why don't ye come an' see me? I thought you was ill, or are you angry with me?"

Bertha, who had opened the door a crack, just enough to let Mina look in, made an ugly grimace. "The old woman," she said gloomily, and a vicious flash came into her eyes, "won't let me out ! If I'd known it ! I be shut up here, buried alive——"

"Bertha," called Miss Abercorn's sharp voice from the room, "whom are you talking to there?"

Bertha closed the door quickly and softly. "Me? I'm talking to myself !"

Outside was spring. Miss Abercorn sent her servant to church every Sunday afternoon, but what use was the hour thus gained ? It did not enter her head to listen to a sleepy afternoon sermon ; to wander about the Sunday streets alone was no pleasure either, one felt quite deserted, quite like an outcast. All the servants were enjoying themselves with their sweethearts. Even Mina she would not find at home ; she was angry with the Reschkes—where should she go ? She would be obliged to have a "young

man" after all, but even that would not help her; on her free Sunday she had to be at home at ten o'clock, before the house was closed. No man would agree to that; it would not be worth his while.

Bertha clenched her fist in angry rage and stamped her foot. She would give notice! Yes, at once! You got quite melancholy here, strange thoughts haunted you in this eternal solitude."

Often enough had Bertha thought of throwing up her situation; but then again came hours in which she was so tired, so incredibly tired and disinclined to anything that she was afraid of a change. Another new place, another new drudgery. Here at least she could sip her liqueur undisturbed. And she took sip after sip till her discomfort had vanished. Thus it was that she remained in this situation.

To-day, the afternoon of a beautiful Sunday in May, Miss Abercorn had gone out. A lady had been there a short time before and had invited her, the well-known benefactress, to join in the work of a society, which, among other aims, made it their task to assemble about them lonely young girls, and offer them a home and pleasant conversation.

Yes, she was the right one to go there! It was ridiculous! "Haha!" Bertha's shrill laugh echoed through the solitary flat. Ah—quite alone! Not even a bird was there, not even a little dog or kitten! She looked round nervously and then she ran to the window and leaned far out. But what did she see in the narrow court? Nothing but sooty walls, and up above them a little piece of sky. Not a creature appeared in the court, not a face to be seen at the kitchen windows; they were all out, all of them, and enjoying their Sunday.

If she could at least have looked out into the street! But Miss Abercorn had locked the front rooms. She could not even do that! And the weather was so glorious! The sunbeam which stole in through the one corner window of the long, narrow sitting-room shone like pure gold; the piece of sky that Bertha could see was deep blue. Oh—never had she had such a longing for air—air, liberty, gaiety.

Like a wild thing she ran from the room to the kitchen and again from the kitchen to the room. She clasped her hands

above her head, stretched herself, and then she screamed, screamed loudly—she wanted to be gay, always gay, why should she not be gay? she must hear something even if it was only her own voice! But her own voice frightened her; shuddering she was silent again and crouched down on a chair. But not on the chair at the window—rather see nothing at all than that little bit which only aroused her longing and did not satisfy it—no, in the corner by the stove. There she sat for a long time apparently sleeping like a hare with open eyes.

Then, after endless yawning, she sprang up suddenly and began her restless wandering about again, and as she wandered her unquiet eyes searched everywhere, sometimes here, sometimes there. There was not much to see, she knew it all so well, but—Miss Abercorn had left the key in the middle drawer of her writing-table.

One, two, three—she sat before it. How interesting! Her fingers rummaged in the papers. How amusing, the old woman kept all her bills, since goodness knows when! And here were receipts, and there notes of hand, and there a stocks and shares list. And there a cardboard box full of copper coins, and there one full of threepenny bits. The tiny things shone like fish scales. Whoever had so many of them! They were good money too. Well pleased Bertha let the silver scales glide from one hand into the other. She was drained quite dry again; how was it possible to manage with her low wages? A large bottle of the sweet liqueur cost one-and-twopence; it was not worth while fetching a small one.

She could not turn away her eyes from the silver scales, there must be a quantity of them in the cardboard box. How many might there be? She began to count, from the box into her hand, and from her hand into her apron. Quite a nice game—there—a rattling at the corridor door outside, a key put in the lock, turned round! The old woman! There she was.

Bertha had just time enough to throw the coins into the box, and to push the drawer in.

Miss Abercorn scrutinized the girl, who had gone red with the surprise; she seemed astonished to find Bertha in the room. Her eyes wandered round suspiciously—now they rested on the writing-

table—the key was in! Her pupils dilated, with an expression of anxious distrust she looked from the writing-table to the girl, from the girl to the writing-table. But she said nothing.

The following afternoon she proposed to Bertha with unusual kindness to enjoy the fine air and to unite a walk with some shopping. Bertha accepted, she had a mad longing to speak to some one; she would scarcely find Mina at home, but perhaps Frida was there.

When she had walked to the end of the street and had dawdled a while before a shop-window it struck her she might have brought down the empty liqueur bottle and have had it filled at the public-house, at the corner of the Kirchbachstrasse. She had revived this old acquaintance some time before, but it had not come to anything except a few words snatched by stealth; to-day she would really have time to stand before the bar and inhale the smell of spirits which she loved so much.

She turned back quickly and slipped up the stairs. Noiselessly she opened the kitchen door—if only Miss Abercorn did not hear her. With her mouth open she stood rooted to the ground. One glance was enough.

The door which led from the kitchen to her little room was ajar, she looked through the crack; there knelt Miss Abercorn before her open basket. She could hardly have left the house before she had rushed in, for some of the things were pulled out and lay on the floor. And the old woman rummaged and rummaged.

What was she doing, what was she looking for? A cry of rage almost escaped from Bertha's lips. She was no thief whose boxes must be searched—oho! Her eyes flashed; she ground her teeth together till they grated, doubled her fists and shook them in the air. She would rush at her, seize her by the throat, shake her: "How dare you? Wait, I'll teach ye! You wait!"

A fearful menace lay in Bertha's whole aspect, a wild glare in her eyes, her blanched face was convulsed—at her, seize her!

But now her arms sank to her sides, as if suddenly weak; her eyes lost their lustre, her erect figure drooped, all her energy had taken flight. What was the use? She never got justice. Had the woman at the lodgings acknowledged that she was right?

Had Mrs. Selinger believed her? No, nobody! And suppose she seized her in there and treated her as she deserved? No, no, her head sank despondingly—she would never get justice.

For a moment she stood hesitating, in gloomy thought, then she slipped out as noiselessly as she had come.

From this time mistress and maid watched one another like two vicious dogs, that apparently peaceful, apparently harmless, slink around with tail tucked in and perpetually on their guard.

Bertha changed more and more from day to day. There was nothing of her former easy grace in her movements. She dragged her feet as if everything were too much for her, every exertion too troublesome. Her eyes were tired, often glazed. She who had been wont to make a fuss directly and hold forth when anything did not suit her, had nothing to say now. The silence around her, the ruling power in the everlasting monotony of the days, closed her mouth too. The stillness crept out of the corners, laid its heavy paws upon her shoulders and pressed her down. An infinite hopelessness had taken possession of her. It could never be better. Nowhere else either; whether she was in this place or that, always the same joyless, hopeless future.

A deeper and deeper lethargy fell upon her, like a net from which no effort would extricate her.

Even sleep did not refresh her. Then she dreamt of Miss Abercorn, who was stronger than she was. She bent over her bed with her thin neck, her thin lips were closed in stony silence: she stretched out her hand in the black kid glove and laid it on her breast. Her hand weighed upon her like a nightmare. Away, away!

The sleeping girl groaned, fought for breath, and struck out with hands and feet. She half rose, she resisted, she struggled for her life—away, away!

The black hand still weighed her down—there—Bertha seized it and awoke in the same moment from the long-drawn cry she uttered.

Seized with nervous trembling, tormented by terrible palpitation, she sat up in the bed moaning. Around her everything was quiet—lonely—nobody there. And yet she shuddered in sudden terror, twisted her fingers in her hair and looked round wildly and fearfully.

And so the days passed, cold, empty, joyless, uneventful.

Sometimes an organ-grinder came into the court, then Bertha rushed to the window in excited haste. But Miss Abercorn called down so angrily to the man about the noise he made that the landlord had a placard put up in the doorway—

*“Begging, peddling and music forbidden.  
By order of the Police.”*

The organ-grinder did not come again.

One evening the roof of a neighbouring house was on fire; a poor woman, who with her children had a garret high up at the top, screamed for help.

In an ecstasy of terror Bertha stood on the kitchen window-sill, she had slung one arm round the mullion and leant far out. Her clothes, caught by the wind, blew out like a flag; some sparks, carried across from the burning roof, flew into her face. Her nostrils dilated, her white teeth showed in a smile—oh, a change, only a change at any price.

She was almost sorry that the fire brigade put out the fire so quickly and the excited screams of the terrified people no longer tickled her ear. The monotonous quiet was soon back again.

But Bertha lay awake in her bed the whole night; her overwrought nerves would not calm down. She felt brighter, roused out of her heavy indifference—oh, what good the little change had done her.

The most terrible thing that could happen would be preferable to this deadly monotony. What would she have done without the sweet liqueur? She drank it more frequently, often in the early morning and always in longer sips. But in this state of semi-intoxication she no longer had the pleasant feeling of being transported from her surroundings; a little drop made no impression on her now, she must take more. And then her body became heavy, her thoughts wandered; she fell asleep sitting on the kitchen bench, her head leaning backwards against the wall. When she started up out of this leaden sleep she was irritable and ill-tempered; she could have smashed everything, her hands trembled, the corners of her mouth twitched with suppressed excitement. She felt ill, and yet she drank—it was her only distraction.

Spring had departed. Whether it was spring or summer Bertha did not notice the transition. She no longer went out on Sundays ; it made her so angry to see other people happy. She moped at home, preoccupied and embittered, or she threw herself on the bed in her room and slept away the hours of the long, bright, summer afternoon.

Her glass showed her a pale face and heavy eyes with dark shadows under them ; then she burst into tears, into floods of burning, consuming, angry tears, fell on her knees by her bed and buried her head in the pillow. There she remained, languid, crushed, prostrate.

Miss Abercorn might have been satisfied with her stay-at-home maid, but she was not. Who could say what this quiet girl was thinking of? Was she to be trusted? She sometimes caught a sinister look from those blue eyes which alarmed her. She watched carefully that her servant made no acquaintances in the house. Nobody was allowed in the kitchen ; not even Mina since she had found her in confidential conversation with Bertha. Why did she creep in so secretly? She had a basket on her arm, too, quite adapted to carrying something away.

“What did Mrs. Reschke want here?” Miss Abercorn had asked, when Mina, hurt by her suspicious glance, had retired quickly. “Come to see you? I do not wish to have visitors in the kitchen and conversation on the back-stairs. Gossiping leads to no good : a bad character is the result—that you ought to know !”

A bad character ! Bertha winced—she had bad characters from her last places. If only Miss Abercorn would not speak of it ! She could not stand hearing about it, and lately she came back to it again and again, as if her object were to irritate her. A rude word was on the tip of her tongue, but she had not the strength to pronounce it. She lowered her head, and only shot a gloomy glance at her mistress from under her eyelids.

Miss Abercorn put books into the drawer of the kitchen-table, since she had taken to going every Sunday to the society for offering lonely young girls a home and recreation on their free Sunday afternoon. “Read them, they will interest you, and also do you good !”



But Bertha soon threw the "slow things" into a corner or trampled on them furiously, seized by one of her fits of silent rage. The contents did not interest her at all. They were written by people who had no idea of what a girl wanted.

If she could at least have spoken to Mina! But she was only to be found at home late in the afternoon. An inexplicable longing for Mina took hold of Bertha. One evening, when she brought in Miss Abercorn's tea,—she always drank her weak tea, whether it was summer heat or winter cold—she asked if she might go out for an hour?

"Now, on a week-day? So late in the evening?"

And so "No"! Miss Abercorn had not finished expressing her astonishment when Bertha turned away. Without waiting, without adding a single word to her request, she left the room in mute obstinacy.

In the kitchen it was close and sultry, the air heavy and oppressive. Not a breath from the narrow court. The sound of servants singing came across from somewhere, out of tune and plaintive.

With an inarticulate cry Bertha tore her dress open at the throat and struggled for breath, her mouth wide open, her arms thrown up.

Then she fell heavily on to her accustomed place at the kitchen-table. Resting her cheek on her right fist, she bit the nails of her left hand. Her forehead, over which the silky, fair hair was parted, contracted in deep lines.

The summer night grew darker and darker, every light was extinguished behind the windows of the house.

She still sat there motionless. In the dark her figure was only to be guessed at by the still darker outlines and the white gleam of the restlessly moving eyeballs. . . .

One morning in the following week Miss Abercorn went out on one of her usual, mysterious visits to her banker, and hardly had she left the house when Bertha slammed the kitchen-door behind her and flew down the stairs. The vegetables might burn, the soup boil over—she must see people, she must, she must!

She had been ill for some days, had indeed been obliged to stay in bed; she could not say what was really the matter. Her

craving was so intense. Her craving for life, for people. Oh, only not this terrible sameness! This loneliness, in which thoughts arose out of every corner and stared at you with wandering, wicked eyes till you got quite wandering and confused. They spoke in whispers, and yet so impressively, so clearly, that every word was understood. You still heard them even when you put both hands against your ears and ran up and down the kitchen; up and down like a wild animal, always up and down.

With a deep sigh Bertha breathed the summer air before the door. What a good thing that she had at last roused herself and taken advantage of Miss Abercorn's absence! And yet she felt so languid, so depressed, that she would really rather have gone up-stairs again. The rattling of every cart, the barking of every dog, alarmed her and made her start nervously.

She leant against the door-post with a moody face, her arms crossed over her breast; tired and indifferent she blinked in the sunshine. The cheerful street, to-day so full of life, no longer interested her.

On the pavement, not far from the door, a whole troop of children had assembled; with curious, wide-open eyes they stood round little Ella Reschke. She had put on a black shawl of her mother's over her gay frock, one end trailed on the ground behind over the short red skirt. Flourishing her hands in the air and accompanying her story with all sorts of gestures, she was apparently describing something with excited importance. On her precocious child's face lay a strange expression, a mixture of proud self-importance and timid fear.

A whole knot of grown-ups was gathering before the Reschkes' cellar: only a few men, women principally, and all the servant-maids in the neighbourhood. They stopped up the entrance to the steps, whispered in an under-tone, pointed down into the cellar, raised their shoulders commiseratingly, and whispered again.

An accident had happened! She must see what it was! Bertha darted forward—her indifference had gone, she was all curiosity. Her eyes sparkled; she wriggled quickly through the crowd, her head stretched in front of her, her nose in the air.

“Wot's the matter? Wot's happened?”

Nobody answered her, the attention of all was directed to a woman who just now appeared on the bottom step. All the voices called together—

“Now then, quick, Mrs. Büxenstein, tell us!”

“Is’t reelly true? The Reschkes do ’ave bad luck!”

“Is’t possible, so sudden!”

“’Ave ye seen ’er?”

“’Ave I seen ’er?” said Mrs. Büxenstein, and wiped her fat face with her handkerchief. “O Lor’, it’s ’ot! Me an’ Mrs. Reschke are old friends. An’ I’ve seen ’er grow up. Poor girl, at her age, too! Who’d ha’ thought it! She sat ’ere yesterday evenin’.” She pointed to the top step, and they all moved back and looked at the spot with much interest.

“It were ’ere. She sat ’ere yesterday evenin’ to git some air. No, I wouldn’t have believed it if ye’d told me!”

“Well, she looked bad enough,” said a pretty, rosy servant-girl, “that she did!” She tapped the dazzling white apron-bib which was strained over her breast. “Skin an’ bone, enough to frighten you!”

“I liked her,” said somebody.

“So did I!”

“So did I!”

“She often come to us!”

“Oh, she were every day in our ’ouse!”

“She were partic’lar fond o’ me,” said Mrs. Büxenstein, and mopped again with her handkerchief. “She didn’t care to talk much, but she allus dropped me ’er curtsey: ‘Mornin’, Mrs. Büxenstein!’ A good girl—that I do say!”

“I’m curious,” whispered the pale, starved-looking wife of the coffin-maker’s in the Kirchbachstrasse to a woman standing by her, “if they’ll take the coffin from my ’usband, or if they’ll go to one of the big shops. They’ll not git it cheaper there, but it ’ud be just like ’em to do it.”

Mrs. Büxenstein had heard the whisper. “Yer needn’t be so eager,” she said, with a reproving look. “The poor people, an’ she scarce cold! That yer should think o’ that at once!”

“Well, you ain’t got no cause to,” said the carpenter’s wife venomously.

“Now then!” The big, stout woman put her arms akimbo and looked down on the thin, little one. “D’ye want a row?”

A quarrel seemed inevitable, but curiosity was stronger. One of the girls could not stand it any longer, and had run down into the cellar; now the others pushed after her. Every one wanted to be first!

Mrs. Büxenstein turned back again too. That was a jostling and hustling and squeezing down the narrow steps; every foot trod on the tell-tale step, and the hidden bell jangled and twanged and squeaked.

Bertha had crept after the others. Even if Mrs. Reschke was angry with her, and she herself had sworn never to enter the cellar again—to-day was an exception! Her little tongue passed quickly over the red lips.

Some baskets had been upset down below. The half-dark shop was crowded with people. Now Ella sprang after them, and hastily squeezed through the partly-opened door of the sitting-room; she would also see what there was to be seen.

From inside came the sound of Mrs. Reschke’s loud weeping.

Outside the sympathizers nudged one another.

“She needn’t take on like that,” whispered Mrs. Büxenstein. “As long as she lived she couldn’t bear ’er. Now then—now, now, gently!”

Mrs. Reschke seemed to be giving way to another burst of grief, Mina’s voice was heard soothing her.

“Where’s the old man?” asked one of the servant-girls curiously. “There’s nothing to be heard of him!”

Yes, where could Father Reschke be? How would he take it? There was no more hanging back now, those in front knocked, those behind pushed; scarcely waiting for the “Come in,” they entered, a whole procession, with looks of the deepest grief.

“Oh, Mrs. Reschke, wot trouble!”

“The dear girl, the dear girl!”

“’Ow could it happen so quick?”

“O Lor’, O Lor’!”

General sighing and clasping of hands.

The mother, who had been sitting by the bed, tottered

forward. Her face was swollen, her eyes mere slits. She wept unceasingly, but yet when she saw the many visitors the shadow of a smile with which she was accustomed to greet her customers crept over her puffy face.

There was great shaking of hands, they surrounded her and at the same time looked inquiringly at the bed.

They had laid her there.

“Hush, hush!” The curious women tiptoed nearer.

Maggie’s emaciated body was outlined under the linen sheet they had spread over her. The head was sunk to one side, the lashes of the closed lids rested on the pale cheeks as if in a gentle slumber.

“We found ’er like that in the kitchen this morning,” sobbed her mother. “It must ’ave come in the night; she were quite cold. I sent Reschke for the doctor quick—all o’ no use! Maggie, Maggie, ’ow could ye leave us! Not a sound—not nothin’. Maggie, Maggie!”

Screaming loudly she threw herself over the corpse.

The old man, who was sitting in the sofa-corner, now stirred.

“Mother,” he said, and tried to get up. But his feet gave way under him, he had to lean upon his daughter-in-law, who led him to the bed.

Mina’s face was very grave; she had not wept. When she now saw Bertha she nodded to her sadly. A second glance took in Frida, who sat on a footstool and rocked in her arms a boot-jack wrapped in a coloured rag—it was her doll. Mina took up her child from the floor quickly and pressed her to her bosom.

“It’s better for Maggie,” she whispered, and looked down thoughtfully and compassionately on the dead girl.

“Maggie! Maggie!” screamed Mrs. Reschke, and threw herself with all her weight over the bed again.

She would not allow the sympathizing women to touch her, she behaved like a mad woman.

They were all deeply affected by such grief; handkerchiefs were taken out, sobbing and crying heard.

“Scurvy lot!” suddenly screamed the parrot, that had sat on its perch in the corner, unnoticed, and then again, so piercingly that the mourners started, “Scurvy lot!”

"The horrid creature!" Mina quickly threw a cloth over the cage.

Old Reschke stood silently by his wife with interlaced hands and bowed back; he had dragged himself there to console her, now he did not know what to say. Embarrassed he looked at her, embarrassed he looked around.

They had all crowded up to the bed.

Ella slipped between her parents and now stood nearest. She was very pale, trembled at the sight of the waxen face, and yet stared upon it with wide-open eyes.

"Take away Ella," whispered somebody.

Mrs. Reschke had heard it. "No, no," she screamed; "me only daughter!" She seized the child, who struggled in her embrace like a fluttering bird, and covered her with kisses.

"Me only daughter! Me little Ella! Me only joy!"

"Reschke, don't excite yerself so," said Mrs. Büxenstein.

"Come, git up!"

Many willing hands raised the despairing mother. Leaning her head on her friend's shoulder and holding Ella tightly by the hand, Mrs. Reschke tottered through the room.

"There, there. Pull yerself together," said Mrs. Büxenstein. "Come out of 'ere a bit, Reschke, be reasonable! Git a breath of air, an' eat a morsel, you ain't got nothin' inside ye, I'll be bound! There." With a sigh of satisfaction she pushed the tottering figure into the shop. The whole swarm crowded in after them.

The air was better here, not quite so heavy; there was a draught from the open, blue-varnished door.

Mrs. Reschke had sunk upon the inverted tub. At the sight of her counter she gradually recovered. She found words.

It relieved her to give all the details, only interrupted by the "Ah!" and "Oh!" of the interested circle of listeners.

What Maggie had done yesterday, what she had eaten, what she had said, how she had lain in her bed on the kitchen-table this morning—everything was related.

"An' I goes to the kitchen at six, or 'alf-past—an'll put on the water for coffee—she's asleep. An' I looks at 'er; wot I can by the bad light; she do look strange! An' I calls to 'er: 'Now,

Maggie!’ An’ I takes ’er ’and. ‘Wot’s the matter again, Maggie?’ . . . Quite cold. . . . If I’d knowed that, I’d ’ave done anythin’, anythin’ to please ’er!”

The mother broke out into violent sobs again, and buried her face in her wet handkerchief.

“Sad, sad,” sighed the listeners.

“Sad!” said the pretty, rosy servant-girl with the dazzling apron, and poked another girl in the side with her basket. “When we’re ill, it’s much sadder, ain’t it? Nobody troubles about us. We could be dead an’ buried ’fore they’d hear anything about it at home. In my last place I got the rheumatics——”

“Oh dear,” interrupted somebody, “they let you sleep in the bath-room, didn’t they?”

“I kept going first of all, said nothin’—didn’t want to be ill—an’ then when I couldn’t stand it any longer they wanted to put me in an ’ospital——”

“An ’ospital; I know summat about that, all full, weren’t it?”

“The mistress had to keep me a week afore I could get in—they were kind, I must say—but she had her hands full. There was no stove in the room, an’ it were winter an’ me so stiff I couldn’t move, they had to feed me.”

“That ain’t nothin’!” screamed another; “when I was at the Bülows’, I got the fever; wanted to jump out o’ the window the first night, they ’ad to tie me down!”

“An’ they drove about in the town with me for four hours with a broken leg, ’fore they could get rid of me in an ’ospital!”

“Yer don’t say so!”

“A shame!”

“Did yer ever!”

The rosy little servant-girl was constantly interrupted, every one wanted to tell of her own sufferings. At last she could say—“An’ when I got into the ’ospital I couldn’t stir for five weeks. An’ then—I couldn’t take a place at once—then I went home. My mother is a widow—an’ I’ve seven younger brothers an’ sisters—they weren’t exactly pleased to see me! As long as I live I’ll never forget the journey! Couldn’t sit, couldn’t stand; didn’t

know how to bear it. An' then I were jolted about in a cart for an hour from the station to the village, through rain an' snow."

"Are ye quite healthy agin now?" asked a woman.

"Oh yes. My heart ain't quite right, that's all!"

The young thing laughed gaily, and then looked at Mrs. Reschke, alarmed that she might take the laughing ill.

But she was too much interested; she listened attentively. Other similar and dissimilar cases were brought forward; the conversation became general. . . .

Father Reschke, Mina and Bertha had remained behind in the room. They all three stood by the bed. The old man was still in his former attitude, his back bent, his hands interlaced. But he no longer cast embarrassed, wandering glances round the room, his eyes rested intently on the calm features of his child. Not a muscle moved in his furrowed face, the tears streamed down his cheeks. He did not seem to notice them, he let them run.

"Father, you'll weep yerself blind!" Mina took his hand; she was obliged to weep now. "Father, it's better for her!"

"Yes, it's better for Maggie," said the old man with strange emphasis, "but for——"

He did not finish, and Mina did not know whom he was thinking of.

Bertha stood by without stirring, her eyes riveted on the waxen face. Her lashes did not quiver, not a tear wetted her cheek. She was spellbound.

And so this was death! She had never seen any one dead before, only little dead babies, at her mother's, formerly; but they looked like dolls.

Here was the first dead person.

She breathed deeply—it was not so dreadful! She had no rest till she had lifted a corner of the sheet and looked at the figure, which lay stiff and straight under it. And her fingers glided over the motionless breast, and then over the hands, the arms, the throat, the cheeks. Cold as ice. But she felt no fear. She smoothed the hair away from the dead girl's forehead. . . .

When Bertha slipped out through the shop, half-an-hour later,



she only found a few sympathizers there, most of them had gone about their work again.

Mrs. Reschke, too, stood behind the counter; with her right hand she held out a bundle of onions to a customer, her left hand wiped away the still trickling tears.

A young servant-maid from the neighbourhood came and brought the myrtle wreath for the dead girl.

### XXXIII

OUTSIDE the town, beyond the last streets, the geranium which Mina had carried out and placed on Maggie's grave blossomed luxuriantly and brilliantly. The grass was green on the pieces of turf which Ella, in child's play, had laid on the narrow grave and which had taken root there. The wind had carried all kinds of seeds here; weeds and daisies sprang up, and slender stalks swayed in the wind.

The Reschkes had never had a better child.

Every Sunday afternoon Mrs. Reschke, in the streaming crape veil, with a green watering-can on her arm, went to water the grave.

Ella, who came with her mother, played between the graves meanwhile; she never went away without adorning herself with a rose, stolen from somewhere.

The old man did not go to the churchyard with them, he sat at home as usual, smoked and drank his white beer; but his face was quite shrivelled.

Arthur had had a broad crape band put round his hat and another on his sleeve, he was particular about doing the correct thing—he had that from his mother.

He was still in the printing-office, and so far seemed to like it. His wages had, indeed, not been raised; he had still nothing else to do but to wash the inking-rollers, oil and clean the machines, put the forms into the press and lift them out. But he had found comrades who were impressed by his education. He talked big,

and gave his opinion about everything possible with an assurance which forced the others to agree with him.

Only with the composers he was always having trouble. They were a conceited, supercilious pack. They had the "compositor-momania" of thinking much of themselves, as Arthur said. They probably imagined that fingering the type was the same as having written the books. He understood at least as much as they did, probably a little more; had he not spent his whole youth amongst books? He was not going to be put down by those fellows! And so in the great hall, in spite of the stamping of the machines and the humming of the girths, his clear voice could be heard; the composers might turn round ever so angrily: "Hush, quiet!" They need not give themselves such airs! It was quiet enough for their mechanical work.

Between Arthur and one compositor, a pale, nervous man with an irritable voice, there was perpetual enmity. If the latter had to call his services into requisition, he was certain to have to wait a long time; Arthur never passed his frame without walking heavily or letting something he carried fall to the ground. When the nervous man started, all the others laughed.

The foreman had stormed at Arthur once or twice already; he did not trouble about it. On the contrary, his comrades drank his health afterwards in the public-house; then he laughed, struck the table with his fist, called for the landlord, and ordered beer all round.

A dashing fellow! Mother Reschke had reason to be secretly proud of him. When he visited her—that was not too often—she stood for a long time at the cellar-door and looked after him. With his soft, broad-brimmed hat and curly hair there was something of an artist about him. The prettiest girls made eyes at him; more than one came into the cellar and inquired for "handsome Arthur." What a pity he was married! And Mother Reschke sighed: "Pity indeed! 'E's throwed 'imself away!"

When Arthur came home his wife did not strike him as attractive at all—her figure was so awkward, she had no waist. He preferred not to look at her, or when he was in a good humour he called her "old woman," just like Bartuschewski did his wife.

But this word of endearment had been heard less and less lately. From day to day he came home more depressed.

If Mina asked him whether anything was the matter he grumbled out something unintelligible; and so at last she gave up asking. But her heart was heavy. . . .

To-day it was late in the night; 'Mina sat and mended. Frida slept in her basket, but it was already too short for her, she had to curl herself up. With a deep sigh Mina let the work drop from her hand—how long would it be before they must get a bedstead for the child? As it was the cot would be required elsewhere!

The woman rested her head sadly on her hand and gazed fixedly before her.

The air that came in through the open window had something of autumnal coolness; a broad streak of silver moonlight dimmed the light of the poor little lamp. Arthur was not yet home. If he would only come! Mina got up, and yawning loudly looked moodily round. It was no use waiting, she must go to bed or she would fall asleep over the wash-tub to-morrow; let him break his neck or legs in the darkness! He would not have it otherwise.

She was just going to slip off her dress when she heard the trampling of feet on the stairs; now she picked up the lamp quickly and hurried out to light him up.

She had not seen him since early morning.

Arthur no longer troubled to come home for dinner to warm up the bit of food for himself; it had been cooked the evening before, and now in summer did not even taste quite fresh. And the room was so bare, not even Frida there. Since Maggie's death, and since the child's finger had nearly been crushed under the great mangle in the cellar, where nobody looked after her, Mina had taken the little one with her. And so Arthur preferred to dine in a cheap public-house near the printing-office. It was a grand joke that the compositors frequented the place too; there was no lack of opportunity for letting his light shine as a relish to the meal.

As he now tramped up the top steps Mina noticed at once—he was drunk. He staggered and stumbled, and a smell of spirits came from him. She seized him by the arm, holding the lamp high with the other hand to show him the threshold.

“Goodness!” Suppressing a cry she drew him quickly into the room. There were clots of dried blood on his forehead, his cheek, his nose; it had run on to his shirt and trickled down further. His hair was smeared with blood. A great cut with jagged edges ran right across his forehead from the skull.

Had he fallen? She pushed him on to a chair and began to wash off the dried blood with the corner of a towel; it was not so bad as it looked. She grew calmer.

He kept quite still, only muttered abusive words to himself. “Have yer been fightin’, Arthur?”

“I have!” He laughed grimly. “That ass—that compositor——” The rest was a stutter.

“But, Arthur, how could ye?” It was only a very slight reproach, accompanied too by an anxious little nudge of her elbow, but the drunken man sprang up in a fury. Seizing the lamp in his fist he dashed it from the table, so that it broke into a thousand pieces on the floor.

Only the moon gave light now.

“But, Arthur, Arthur!” In vain she tried to draw him down on his chair again.

“Let me be!” he screamed. “I’ll not be put on, not by you, not by him, not by an—any—one!” He flourished his arms wildly in the air.

She controlled herself with an effort, pressed him down by force, and stroked him gently. “Never mind, Arthur! You’re quite right, you shan’t be put upon!”

“Wo—wo—won’t,” he growled. “Dis—dis—missed—haha! Don’t care—haha—dismissed!”

Mina raised her head, an expression of strained attention was on her face. “Wot d’ye say? Who’s dismissed?”

“Don’t care—not a straw! But the—com—com—compositor—the scamp—I’ve taught him—man—man—manners!” He laughed gaily. “Let him go an’ tell—ta—tales—all the same to me—dismissed—haha-haha!—Rot!” He passed his hand over his forehead and roared: “Rascal—I’ll teach ye to throw—a—a—mug at my head. You scoundrel—you——”

“Arthur!” She seized him by the shoulders with both hands and shook him violently. “Who’s dismissed? Not you?”

"Yes," he said suddenly, apparently quite sober. "Saturday—is the end of it!"

"Dismissed from the printing-office? Arthur!" she shrieked. And now she could restrain herself no longer, a flood of despairing complaints, despairing reproaches, streamed from her lips.

No place, no place again? What was to become of them? He stayed nowhere! Nothing suited him! And therefore nobody was satisfied with him. What were they to do when the summer had gone, when they had to have a fire? She could not earn enough for them all. Where would he find work again? Nowhere, nowhere!

She wrung her hands.

And when she could not work any more? When the time came when—when—she—when——

He had listened to her so far quite quietly, as if stunned. Now he suddenly roared: "Hold yer tongue!"

She burst into wild, despairing sobs, and between her sobs brought out: "How'll we get enough to eat—an' another child?"

"What——?" Now he was on his feet, his face purple. "Another—what—another?" He raised his arm to strike. "Say—say it again—curse ye!"

She ducked to avoid the blow. With a scream she fled behind the table.

His eyes rolled, he drummed on the table with the fury of a madman. "You dare—d'ye hear, I—I won't—another—no—you dare—you—you!"

He looked at her terrifyingly, threateningly.

She had never seen him like this. A mortal terror took possession of her at the sight of his scowling, bloodshot eyes; wisps of hair hung over his face, in throwing his arms about he had struck himself on the forehead, now the blood trickled down again.

His whole appearance inspired horror, his young face was quite distorted with passion, quite furrowed. She hardly recognized her husband.

Seized with fear she rushed to the door, trembling. He went after her with his fists in the air.

Already she was down the top flight.

He did not follow her.

But now he stormed through the room like a maniac—crash, crash—clatter, clatter. Now Frida screamed piercingly.

Suppose he hurt the child! Swift as lightning the mother was up-stairs again.

There stood Frida in her cot, bolt upright, with horrified eyes, while her father tore about smashing everything with his stick. Crash—now against the wall—rattle, now into the shelf. All the beautiful china in pieces.

“Arthur!”

He did not hear her; he still flourished his stick. Now she rushed into the room, snatched the child out of her bed, and pressed her to her bosom that he should not kill her.

Only now he noticed her. “You—you——!”

She fled—he after her, brandishing the stick.

She flew down the stairs, he stumbled after her.

“My wife—I’ll kill her—my wife.” His loud voice, in the silence of the night, rang through the house.

Doors creaked and were opened, shafts of light fell on the stairs.

She fled in frantic terror.

“My wife—stop her—where is she—my wife?”

Further and further—now she was down in the cellar. She crouched in the darkest corner, her heart was beating violently, her head in a whirl. Staring into the darkness with wide-open eyes and pressing the whimpering child closely to her she listened to what was going on up-stairs. He would not find her here. She still heard his screams: “My wife, my wife”—and then other voices.

The whole house was alarmed. Mina cowered together with a feeling of unutterable shame.

By degrees it became quiet, they had probably calmed him. She still listened, holding her breath; at last she got up. How long might she have been sitting here? She was quite stiff. Frida sneezed and coughed; she had certainly caught cold! But where, where should she go?

Mina did not dare return to her own room yet. Slowly, heavily, she mounted the cellar-steps, she would like to have gone up on

her hands and knees, her feet would scarcely carry her. Where to—where to? . . .

There was still light at the Bartuschewskis'. Though they were enemies, and did not even say "Good-morning," she knocked at the door. Mrs. Bartuschewski, in a petticoat and night-jacket, opened it. "Bartuschewski's up with your husband," she whispered, and drew Mina hastily over the threshold. "Come in!"

For some minutes the two women looked at each other mutely, then they nodded—sadly, meaningly—and fell weeping upon each other's necks. They were reconciled. . . .

In the morning, when Mina knew her husband was out of the house, she clambered up the many stairs. She could not go to wash to-day, even if she should lose her place; she felt too poorly.

She held on to the banisters like an old woman, and toiled up one stair after another. Her heart beat when she turned the handle of her door—suppose she should find him there? She did not want to see him again at all—no, never, never again.

Drawing a deep breath she went in. He had gone! There was the disordered bed—pillows, sheet, counterpane tossed about. There was the dirty washhand-basin—the water was still red—there lay the towel she had washed the blood off with—and there, dark drops of blood everywhere, on the boards, on the threshold.

And broken pieces of china! The bright morning sun showed up everything.

With a cry of pain Mina knelt down by the little stove. Oh, her pride, her only ornament, her beautiful shelf of china. One solitary little jug hung at the top uninjured, otherwise only some handles still dangled from the blue tape bows. Everything had been knocked down, everything. He had even smashed the wooden spoons. The madman!

With trembling hands Mina collected the pieces in her apron; she cut her fingers doing so, but she did not notice it. She cowered on the floor quite crushed, and stared at the empty shelves.

Mrs. Bartuschewski, who came up after her with Frida, found her there. With sympathizing loquacity she tried to console

Mina, but she only shook her head and moaned continually: "My china, my china!"

Frida, who had at first looked round with wondering eyes, began to cry miserably; she was afraid of the disorderly room, afraid of her mother too, and retreated from her, clinging to Mrs. Bartuschewski's skirts.

This brought Mina to her senses. Putting her still uncombed hair out of her face she arose with a deep sigh. It was all of no use, there was no help for it. She began to clear. Mrs. Bartuschewski was so kind as to take the broken pieces down-stairs with her—she could not throw her beautiful china into the dust-bin herself—no, that would have broken her heart.

The sun laughed as brightly and cheerfully as ever while Mina swept and rubbed and tidied. The great petroleum stain by the table was not to be got out so easily in spite of her scrubbing; it was still worse with the dried drops of blood. Mina had to scratch them from the boards with her thumb-nail.

In a few hours everything was spotless; she had taken advantage of the opportunity, and had a regular cleaning, rubbed down the walls, cleaned the window. Now she looked round: it was all once more as if nothing had happened, and yet—her eyes fell on the empty shelves, and her face, which had cleared a little during her work, clouded over again.

At noon she resolved that she would still go and wash. Perhaps the lady would not be angry if she came at least for half the day; she would get it done if she set to work with double energy, for she must not lose any place now, not one! With a troubled face she gazed at the empty shelves, and then at the cot which was too small for Frida—what expenses there would be coming! She broke out into a cold perspiration. Taking Frida by the hand she descended the stairs with heavy, tired steps.

When Arthur came home towards midnight, his hands in his trousers-pockets, whistling and apparently unconcerned, he found Mina still up. He had hoped she would be asleep. But it was very late before she had finished washing; now she was undressing Frida, who was heavy with sleep.

She did not stir when he came in, but remained kneeling by the cot with her back to him.



Only the moon gave light. They had no lamp now. Arthur winced, and then he saw the empty shelves. Curse it! He passed his hand over his forehead, which he had bound up as well as he could—ah, the cut was still painful! Altogether he felt miserable, and if he whistled it was really not for pleasure. Of course she thought he had been in the public-house again—let her, he had no money for that—and no inclination either. He had stuck in the cellar with the old people the whole evening after work was over.

His mother, who scented a quarrel with Mina, had flattered him, set before him everything she had that was good, rating her daughter-in-law soundly the whole time. He had listened without protest in mute obstinacy. But when his father suddenly roused himself out of his apathy with, "Mina's a good girl," he did not contradict either.

No, she was not bad! He looked across at her while he undressed and whistled louder. She still did not stir, did not get up, though Frida had long fallen asleep.

Well, if she would not, she would not! His downcast look became embarrassed; angrily flinging off his boots, he threw himself on to the bed, which creaked under him.

The moon shone full into his face, uneasy thoughts chased one another through his brain, and yet he soon fell asleep. Then Mina got into bed, and she too was soon asleep.

They had never talked together overmuch; now they did not speak a word. They got up without saying "Good-morning," went away without "Good-bye," came again without a "Good-evening." This went on for a few days.

To-day was Saturday, the end of the week, the last time that Arthur went to the printing-office.

When Mina returned in the evening he had long been home. She found him sitting at the open window, his elbows on the sill, gazing out into the night.

Clouds hid the moon to-night, it was rainy and dark.

She groped about, only a faint gleam of light helped her to find what was necessary. What Arthur had never done before, he had lit the fire and made coffee for her. She did not thank him, but she poured out a cup, and he could hear her sipping it contentedly.

A silent quarter of an hour passed ; she sat still by the little stove.

Frida was not yet put to bed, Arthur had taken her on his lap ; at first she had shrunk back timidly when her father drew her to him, then she allowed herself to be enticed. Now she was asleep with her head on his breast, and he laid his cheek against her soft hair.

The sound of drinking had ceased.

“Did you enjoy it ?” he asked hesitatingly.

No answer. More silent minutes.

Now her heavy footsteps approached the window. She wanted to take the child from his lap, he held her closer.

“Give her to me,” she said harshly.

“No.”

She went away again, sat down at the table, let her arms hang listlessly by her sides and leant forward.

Was she asleep ? There was no sound of breathing to be heard.

The silence in the room was oppressive.

Now Frida stirred on his lap and sighed ; was she lying uncomfortably ? He got up cautiously and carried her to her cot. It was the first time that he had put his child to bed. He felt the soft little body under his hands, stroked the soft neck, the soft little legs, and thought to himself that there was something quite nice about it, and he could well understand women being so fond of children. For men indeed—now, if it had been a boy to carry on his name, that would have pleased him !

Raising himself from his stooping position over the basket he turned round and looked across at the table. He could not see Mina clearly, it was too dark. He went towards her with his hand stretched out in front of him, and came against her cheek.

“Mina,” he said in a whisper, “are you angry ?” and touched her again.

She pushed him away, and then, as if she had only been waiting for this question, straightened herself on her chair.

“Let be,” she said dully. “It’s not to be altered. Every one’s got some trouble.”

He was moved, her hopeless tone sent the tears into his eyes ; his heart contracted. "Old woman——" He stopped, she was really not so old. "Mina, I was drunk !"

"That ye were."

"An' furious. That cur, the compositor, had told tales of me ! An' you provoked me too. An' my head ached so 'twere enough to make me mad !"

"I've often a headache too."

"Else it wouldn't have happened. Truly, Mina, it wouldn't have happened !"

"P'r'aps not this time, but another."

She said all this quite calmly, but now she suddenly sobbed out loudly, "My china ! All to pieces ! All broken !" Flinging her hands over her face she threw herself over the kitchen-table.

He stood thunderstruck at her grief. "Mina !" With trembling hands he stroked her hair. "Mina !" And then he threw himself down by her, clasped her round the neck and sobbed with her.

Yes, he was a wretch, a miserable fellow, a scoundrel, not worthy of the sun shining upon him. Such a fellow as he ought not to be going about on his two legs at liberty, he ought to be in jail ! Such an idler, sluggard, drunkard, brawler !

There was no end to his self-accusations. And he pressed her closer and closer to him. But now she should see that would never happen again, now she should have a different life of it ! Now he would work, madly, wildly, for her and the children.

"There—there it is !" Taking his last week's wages, received to-day, out of his pocket, he pressed it between the hands which she was holding before her face. "There—that's all of it ! I won't keep anything for myself—nothing at all—never again ! Don't cry ! Say you'll not think any more of it, Mina !"

She gave no answer.

"Forgive me, it weren't meant bad ! Say you'll forgive me !"

"I forgive yer !"

He tried to kiss her.

"You're not to call me 'old woman' any more," she whispered

weakly, still shaken by sobs, "else I'll think I'm like Mrs. Bartuschewski!"

"Nonsense!" he declared, and protested and kissed her till she was breathless. She said nothing, but he could see by the way she twisted her mouth that she smiled.

All at once it was not so dark in the little room. . . .

"Hi, Madam Reschke!" Bartuschewski called after Mina the following day. "Wot d'ye think? The people in the 'ouse has made no end of a row about you! Particular those on the first and second floor. The landlord's goin' to turn you out."

"Let him," said Mina proudly. But then she got a fright—it was so pleasant where they lived, and comparatively cheap!

"D'ye reelly think so, Mr. Bartuschewski? Oh dear! Suppose I were to go to the gentleman," she added, after a pause of anxious thought. "If I were to put it before him an' beg him p'r'aps he'd let us stop?"

Bartuschewski raised his shoulders and moved his head backwards and forwards. "Try it. But I don't believe 'e will. Wot d'ye make sich a devil of a row for? No decent person can put up with it!"

Mina went three times to try and see the owner of the house, who had a flat on Lützow Platz. The third time she was admitted. He was friendly, and, playing with his watch-chain, listened quietly to the work-worn woman who stood humbly before him.

But then he shook his head. "My good woman, you seem to be a respectable person! But the tenants who are paying a good rent complain. You will understand that I must consider them. I cannot permit such disturbances!"

"Oh, do let us stay, sir; we've never been behind with the rent! It's such a beautiful room; where'll we find such a good room?"

"Oh, there are rooms enough to be had!"

"No, no; not such a good one! Oh, do let us stay!" She looked at him entreatingly.

"No, no, my good woman, it's not possible! The respectable tenants would leave! Such a disturbance!" He began to get angry. "Your husband is said not to like work, to be a scape-grace, eh?"

“Oh no!” She got quite scarlet, her voice trembled. “He ain’t that. He were only drunk.”

“Only drunk! A nice state of things! Drunk—is that right and proper? A drunkard! Poor woman!”

She started forward, offended. “Who said that? My husband’s good, my husband’s respectable, I’m not a poor woman!” She drew her shawl around her, and picked up her basket quickly, which she had put down on the floor. Then she looked into the face of the man standing before her, honestly and reproachfully. “Excuse me, sir, but you’ll have been drunk once in yer life, too. Good-evenin’!”

## XXXIV

FURNITURE-VANS pass through the streets late in the evening, and then again early in the morning almost before it is light. A chilly, drizzling, fine rain falls, and the open house-doors show where broad, dirty boots have left broad, dirty marks behind them. It is bad weather, and the great day for moving.

Before the house in the Bahnstrasse where the young Reschkes lived, on the afternoon of this first of October, stood a truck, half of it piled high with furniture, and Arthur and Bartuschewski were just putting the wardrobe down on the other half left free for it, and stuffing the beds in between to keep it from shaking. The rain had set in steadily now.

“Ain’t weather for a dog to be out in! Well, I’m glad I ’aven’t to move to-day,” said Bartuschewski, and struck the beds with his wet hand; “they’ll be soppin’ ’fore you gets to the Alvenslebenstrasse!”

“Curse it!” Arthur took off his overcoat and threw it over the beds. “There, at least we’ll sleep dry, if we ain’t got anything else. Now then, let’s go; have we got everything?”

Bartuschewski looked round; on the pavement, leaning against the wall of the house, stood the empty kitchen-shelf; he picked it up and tossed it on to the top of the load. “Yer ain’t got too much,” he said, with a mocking smile.

Arthur grumbled something unintelligible, and then wiped the perspiration and rain from his cheeks with the back of his hand. "I'm about done. It's no joke carrying that down five flights. A good thing we're on the ground floor in the Alvenslebenstrasse!"

"Let's go in 'ere a moment," Bartuschewski proposed, and pointed to the public-house near. "We deserve a dram, anyway!"

"You go on; I must draw this tighter first." Arthur was embarrassed, and gave his close attention to the cord with which the things were fastened down. "I can't leave everything here alone!"

He threw a shy side-glance at Bartuschewski—if he would only go, then he would make off quickly with the cart!

But Bartuschewski seemed to read what was in his mind, and slapped him on the shoulder, laughing. "No, me man, you're not goin' to slink away! Funky o' Madam Reschke, eh? My old wooman should try it on with me! She'd git a warmin'!"

Arthur said nothing, a shiver ran down his back—oh, it was miserable weather! It would certainly do him good to warm himself in the public-house! But had he not given Mina his word? Before she went to the Alvenslebenstrasse at midday to clean the new flat—holding Frida, who could already help to carry something, in one hand, and scrubbing-brush, bucket and broom in the other—she had looked at him so strangely.

"Don't come too late with the things," she had said, "so that we can get straight as long as it's light. An' you'd better give Bartuschewski sixpence for helpin' to carry down. Don't have anythin' more to do with him. Yer know sittin' in the public-house costs more. An' we haven't got it now!" She had sighed, and then taken his hand. "You'll not sit in the public-house, will ye, Arthur?"

"Why should I?" he had said. "You can be quite easy!"

She was right, they had no money for that now. Had he not been running about for a month looking for work and till now had found nothing? Everywhere he came they wanted just what he could not do. He had offered himself for everything possible, for occupations quite beneath him, only to escape Mina's mute,

questioning, expectant look. But he had not the bodily strength for such work ; the people scanned his slight figure and then sent him off.

“Oh!” He shuddered again. Mina really could not wish him to catch cold. She had only meant not “sit” in the public-house ; if he were to drink something warm standing, she would really not mind, she was much too sensible a woman for that. Suppose he were to get a cough again, perhaps be feverish and have to keep his bed, not be able to go after work, what then ?

His hands dropped the cord which he had been fidgeting with, he moved restlessly from one foot to the other. She need not even know that he had been in the public-house ; who should tell her ? He would be sure not to ; not that he was afraid of her—oho, he would soon show who was master ! But he often felt uncomfortable now when he saw how she slaved. The old man, with all his stupidity, had not been quite so wrong when he growled out the other day, “Should like to know ’ow it ’ud be, if Mina weren’t there !”

With a sound, half an exclamation of annoyance, half a sigh, Arthur passed his hand over his forehead and then winced. The devil ! there was something he would not forget so soon. In rainy weather the scar was still painful.

After all, Mina would not be angry if he told her openly he had been in the public-house ; at the bottom of her heart she did love him !

He stood there thoughtfully looking down at his boots, which were not quite water-tight ; but the warm stockings, which she had knitted for him in her spare time on Sundays, kept the wet out. No, he would not vex her by going to the public-house ! It would take time, too, and she would be waiting for the things in the bare room ; she had not even a chair to sit down upon. And suppose her impatience were to drive her here to look for him ?

A thick drop of rain fell on his nose. “Curse it !” He struck the side of the truck with his fist so that the things rattled and shook.

“Now then,” said Bartuschewski ; “bad spirits ? One drop an’ you’ve forgot it all. She’ll not come for a long time yet. Went to the Alvenslebenstrasse at twelve, didn’t she ? The people

were just out. An' she's got to clear their muck. Yer can be glad that your room up-stairs weren't took at once; you'd 'ave 'ad to turn out pretty quick then, an' wot would ye 'ave done with yer things? But I seed to that. I say, why don't yer go to the old people? They must 'ave room in the cellar now, an' it 'ud be cheap!"

"My wife won't."

"Won't—wot, won't? Ha-ha, you're a fine feller! Come along wi' me at once! I'm cold to the marrow o' me bones. We'll 'ave a dram, eh? An' I'll 'elp yer to push a bit afterwards—you'll stick 'alfway alone, you're such a weak 'un!"

Arthur still resisted.

"Now then, man, on with ye! Or else I'll think yer don't want to treat me arter all I've done for you!"

Arthur could not allow this suspicion to rest on him—anything rather than mean! Rousing himself with an effort, he tilted his hat on the side of his head and took Bartuschewski's arm.

The loaded truck stood there abandoned. The rain had almost ceased, but still table, wardrobe, chair and bed were wet. Few people passed, no one cast a glance at the poor collection of things; only a curious dog snuffed round the wheels and snapped at a hanging piece of cord.

Quarter of an hour had passed, the cart still stood there alone.

Now the figure of a woman approached. She came hastily along by the houses, her skirts, her apron, her uncovered hair fluttered in the wind; she had not given herself time to throw on anything. She was in slippers, too, they flapped on the pavement with every hasty step.

It was Bertha. She disappeared in the doorway like a fitting shadow.

The wind had risen and whistled unhindered over the open railway embankment and through the empty streets. It began to grow dusky, restless clouds scudded across the sky like floating mist.

And Bertha saw everything through a mist when after a time she stepped out from the doorway again. Her face was pale and long from a great disappointment—Mina was not there!

She had turned quite cold with fright when she found the door



open and thrown back on its hinges, the entire room empty, cleared out. No glowing ashes, not a spark in the little stove; everything was cold, silent as the grave. She wandered along by the bare walls, had then sat long at the window and stared out into the grey autumn air. Where was Mina? If she would only come in now, if she could only cling to the strong figure. "Mina, don't desert me, we're from the same village!" . . .

Bertha had never thought of her birth-place, Berlin was so much better. But when she stood so alone in the draughty doorway and gazed restlessly up and down the street she thought of home. But had she a "home"? They had no bit of land of their own which they held dear; they rented the little cottage. And her mother, half peasant, half townswoman, and always out of the house! And when she came back and got out of the peasant's cart, shaken up, exhausted for want of sleep, overdone and cold, she had to take a dram to calm herself, and then she fell asleep, and when she awoke she drank another to revive her, to give herself "spunk" for a new responsibility which her calling brought with it.

Bertha shuddered: no, she would not go home! But where, then; what did she want to do?

She was in despair. This morning, from her kitchen-window, she had seen the servant-girls packing their things—they were nearly all leaving in the house—then the carrier came to fetch away the baskets, chests of drawers and boxes. Only she, she alone, had to stay! To suffer, to pine away in this solitude! But why, then, why did she not look for another situation? Ah! With her fingers twisted in her hair and her pale face pressed against the window, how she had stared across at the others!

They still had hope—hope of a better place, higher wages, more freedom. That was all humbug! A new situation, and again a new situation, and another again, and yet they were all the same. She had no more hope.

And a wild despair which sent the tears into her eyes seized her, an apparently groundless hatred which longed to vent itself in loud, wild screams.

If she could at least have spoken to Mina! A passionate longing came over her for her honest face, her calm words.

She had suddenly felt such an ardent desire to see her, a desire that would have burst all bonds; pushing back the bolt of the back-door she rushed away without permission.

And now Mina was not there. Perhaps the things on the truck were hers? She came nearer: yes, that was Mina's wardrobe, that was her bed, all her poor furniture!

A woman, with a basket on her arm, was just going to turn in at the doorway; Bertha stopped her. With restless, wandering eyes and in an excited voice she asked for the Reschkes. The woman hesitated with her answer. She scanned the girl suspiciously—what did she look like? She certainly meant no good. Perhaps the Reschkes owed her money, or—the woman thought of Arthur: he was a regular gay one—perhaps she was a flame of the husband's! The poor woman with her worn face and the child with the innocent eyes, she would like to spare them trouble; so she said reluctantly—

“The Reschkes be gone long ago!”

“Where, then?”

“Don't know.”

“But those are their things!”

“Are they?”

“Where are they moving to? Do tell me.”

“Don't know. Good-evenin'!”

Bertha still hesitated, undecided; her restless eyes strayed to the right and left—no Mina to be seen! Only the gathering darkness. And then it shot through her mind all at once: Miss Abercorn would miss her! And she set up a trot and ran across the pavement and along by the houses, with fluttering skirts, fluttering apron and fluttering hair. The wind whistled behind her.

She ran till she was out of breath, she trembled with fear, and at the same time her whole being was in a state of revolt. Only no reproaches to-day! She felt that the old woman must not be disagreeable to her to-day; let her dare squint at her, and——! When she had got a box on the ears as a child she had thrown herself flat on the floor, and trampled and screamed; not always, but sometimes.

And to-day——? She ground her teeth, red sparks danced before her eyes. Her knees trembled, her tongue was dry in her

mouth—ah, only one drop! What a good thing that the bottle was still half full, she had had it filled this morning. In her present mood she had double need of her sweet comforter. Oh, to put it to her lips! Empty the bottle to the last drop, and then forget, sleep, lie as if she were dead!

She licked her lips, which were cracked and dry. Quick, quick—her craving drove her; taking two steps at a time she rushed up the stairs.

Suddenly she stopped and clutched at the banisters with a scream—a black figure detached itself from the niche, halted before her . . . .

“Get away, get away!” Bertha struck out, groaning.

Panting for breath she arrived at the top.

Aha, the door was locked! She had been missed. Forcing herself to look as impertinent as possible she stood and waited—she had knocked several times, now she rang the bell gently—but her heart beat anxiously.

At last shuffling footsteps inside.

“Who is there?”

“Me, Bertha!” Bertha wanted to reply pertly, but her voice sounded very dejected after the freezing tone of the question. As soon as she came near the old lady she felt under a spell. The strange smell of the flat, partly decay and partly pent-up air, oppressed her directly she became conscious of it, made her timid, hesitating, possessed by an inexplicable feeling of terror. Her chest tightened, she could hardly breathe.

Cautiously, and pushing back one bolt after the other, Miss Abercorn opened the door. She started back; Bertha regularly ran against her and looked round with wild, gleaming eyes.

“Where were you?” It was not meant to sound ungracious, but the disagreeable feeling that came over the lady at the sight of Bertha’s eyes made her tone short and abrupt. Why did she look at her so? Miss Abercorn shrank back, one, two steps. The hand which held the little lamp trembled. Two red spots burned upon her prominent cheek-bones. She would like to have gone for her—had she not found the door open and Bertha gone! Had she not waited in vain ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, half, a whole hour, and still longer!

But Miss Abercorn did not venture on it just now. "Where were you?"

No answer.

They looked at one another, both restless and fearful.

Bertha had closed the door; now she walked mechanically to the kitchen-table, on which the coffee-things still stood, and began to wash up. She had scarcely noticed the question, it had glided past her ear like an empty sound. There was a rushing and roaring in her head; let her say what she liked if she would only go into the room soon, that she might take a mouthful to strengthen herself! She felt the want of it so badly. Oh, only a drop!

Miss Abercorn's face twitched and worked; she had opened her mouth several times, and then closed it again. If she had not been so alone she would soon have brought this impertinent person to book! But as it was, she gave Bertha a distrustful glance—suppose she were to be insolent?

She certainly held her head down, and was apparently humble; but who could trust a servant? Like a cat that crouches before it springs! The lady's glances became more piercing, more vigilant; the artful person must be watched, she must really not be lost sight of for a moment.

Miss Abercorn retired slowly towards the corridor which led to the room. She stood on the threshold of the kitchen; quick as lightning Bertha raised her head—aha, was the old woman going at last? Her eyes flamed, a triumphant, eager smile contorted her mouth.

Miss Abercorn had observed the look and smile, and at the same moment the idea entered her mind: stop, she is after something! She must not be left alone!

"Come in here," she said, and tried to hide her uneasiness by speaking as harshly as possible. "I will count over the linen you have to wash to-morrow."

Miss Abercorn always did count over the washing, but she had never taken so much time over it as to-day: with every piece she gave long instructions, how it was to be washed, whether it was to be blued, whether it was to be starched or not. And all the time the same watchful, piercing, sidelong glance.

Bertha's hands began to tremble, several times she let what she was holding slip from her fingers. She flushed and paled; she could stand this glance no longer, it made her nervous—no, more than nervous, it annoyed her, made her feverishly excited. An infinite impatience seized her. If she would only be quick—quick, quick—that she could get into the kitchen, hasten to her secret store-room and drink, drink!

She felt quite weak.

But she was not to get away so quickly. For the present the old lady did not let her out of her sight, followed her into the kitchen, again into the room, and then out of the room into the kitchen again. She was not free a moment. When she laid the table for supper Miss Abercorn went backwards and forwards with her, and when she had hoped that her mistress would now sit down to the table she was disappointed. The old lady declared she was not hungry, and would wait a little; meanwhile Bertha could hold a tangled skein of thread for her.

The tormenting impatience, Bertha's ardent longing for her restorative gradually changed into mute, bitter fury. As if she had guessed it, and would not let her go to spite her, she tortured her to death.

She pressed her teeth together, held the thread carelessly, did not see the loops, let whole strands slip from her fingers, and thus delayed the unravelling more and more. But she did not notice that; her one thought was, How can I get away? The bottle, the bottle! Only a mouthful!

Now the threads had twisted quite tightly round her hands, the restless, twitching fingers were regularly wound round. Bertha uttered a hollow sound—oh, if she could only tear herself free, take her teeth to help her, bite through the threads if she could not manage it quickly enough! Only to get away!

Involuntarily she showed her sharp, pointed teeth; her arms made a convulsive, twitching movement; her face was distorted with impatience.

And Miss Abercorn, who sat on the chair before her, wound and wound, slowly and deliberately; put the ball through a loop here, and again there, pulled with her finger-tips there, and now loosened an especially tight knot with a needle.

Bertha suppressed a groan—oh, how bad she felt! Her stomach seemed quite empty, quite shrivelled up, and yet she felt sick, distended. Inside, throat, neck, chest were one parched furrow which craved for moisture. From deep down rose a lump which choked her; her mouth filled with saliva, and yet tongue and palate were quite dry. All at once she could not swallow, and yet was obliged to do so perpetually; a feeling of nervous dread befell her.

And she felt a spasm contract her chest; the shooting pains were like a knife, terrible, horrible, tormenting pains. And they followed quicker and quicker, from the centre across to the shoulders and round to the back. Her whole chest was one ache, her back felt as if it would break. And then the dread, the terrible dread. She broke out in a cold sweat. She gasped—could not breathe. Only to be able to scream, to scream!

Her blanched lips trembled, her eyes were quite fixed and staring. Only not to see the threads any more, this eternal tying, and tugging, and winding! She felt as if a thousand ants were crawling over her hands and feet, they were cold as ice, and as if paralyzed. The room began to turn round with her. Oh, a drop quickly or she would faint!

The clock struck nine. Miss Abercorn wound the last piece of thread round the ball. "There, now bring me the tea!"

Bertha tottered to the kitchen. She groped her way along by the wall, she could not see, could scarcely stand, but her craving gave her strength. She snatched up the bottle from behind the coal-box. Out with the cork—the smell already revived her—quickly to her lips. . . .

Something extraordinary made her pause. She did not see it, but she felt an eye was resting upon her; she heard nothing and yet somebody was there. Terrified, she turned round. . . .

There stood Miss Abercorn, tall, and black, and motionless, and stared at her.

Bertha's knees gave way, the hand which held the bottle fell limp to her side.

"What are you drinking?"

"I—I——!" Bertha uttered nothing more, dazed with fright. . . . Oh, the terrible black figure! The terrible eyes!

The girl trembled, overcome by superstitious terror and the fears of a disordered imagination. Who had come behind her, so noiselessly, without a footstep, without a breath? The black figure became a gigantic shadow, which grew taller and taller.

Bertha was frightened; without resistance she allowed the bottle to be taken out of her hand.

The lady smelt it. "What, spirits? You drink spirits?"

Bertha stood like a criminal; now she sank on the kitchen-bench moaning, threw her hands before her face and shook all over.

Miss Abercorn looked at the girl silently with her black eyes—what had she to say for herself? Minutes passed. Bertha did not speak; she only shook still more violently.

Oh, she was afraid! The lady drew herself up boldly. "What, you are not ashamed to drink spirits in my house? In a respectable house! And you so young! Have you no respect for yourself? No consideration for your mistress, for your own future? Don't you know that the devil is in spirits? And so this is the reason of your bad characters and constant changes! Have you taken to drink long? I suppose you drink often?"

No answer.

"A drunkard! A thorough drunkard! For shame! Will you go the way that unhappily so many of the lower classes go? Drunken men, drunken women. Drink is the beginning of all vice, it leads to crime. Oh!" The lady shuddered, and looked round as if some one were lying in wait for her.

"Where did you get the money from for spirits? Not from your wages, I am quite sure!" A former suspicion seemed to revive in Miss Abercorn, her eyes searched the kitchen. "How can one be so foolishly confiding! Now I am sure I was not deceived when I thought I missed things. Is that my thanks for having taken you in spite of your miserable characters and only at Mrs. Reschke's recommendation? She shall hear what I think of her! To bring such a person into the house, a girl who drinks spirits! But you are all hand-in-glove with one another. The place for you is a reformatory, there you might be cured of your sinful passion!"

Bertha uttered a low moan.

Miss Abercorn heard it with a certain satisfaction—had her words already had so much effect; did the girl repent? The miserable moan made her milder. “I must pity you,” she said. “I will consult with the clergyman and the committee of the Rescue Society. You are still so young——”

Another moan from Bertha.

“You can still be brought into the right way. Spirits, spirits—for shame!” Shaking her head she held the bottle up against the light, smelt it again, and went back into the room. She took the bottle with her.

Bertha remained sitting, she had not the strength to get up. She had heard nothing of all that Miss Abercorn had said. The spasms of pain in her chest were continuous; it was a grinding, torturing pain—how was she to bear it? She dropped her hands from her face and looked round in despair.

She was alone. The kitchen-lamp threw trembling rings of light on the whitewashed ceiling; the petroleum cooking-stove flared and smoked, the water in the little kettle had long boiled, bubbled over and sent the lid on to the floor, where it rolled along. Bertha started up in nervous terror. Oh, the water was boiling; Miss Abercorn wanted to drink her tea now! Drink! . . . Her tongue forced itself between the clenched teeth and passed thirstily over the dry lips.

The bottle—her eyes rolled round in search of it—where was it? Gone! Miss Abercorn had taken it. Bertha threw out her hands wildly. “My bottle!” And then she collapsed again.

The water bubbled and gurgled and ran over; the petroleum flame went out with a hiss and a smother, filling the room with a disagreeable smell.

Bertha rose; with bent back, groping along by the kitchen-range, she crept to the cooking-stove. She poured the water on the tea as she did every day, waited the right number of minutes for it to draw; but she did not know what she was doing, she was a machine.

Drink, drink, only one drop on her tongue! It hung out of her mouth. Her throat was parched and contracted. “Oh!” She gave a long trembling groan. The torment was too great. Her liqueur, she must have it!



Her hand held the tray unsteadily, it swayed, the teapot slipped backwards and forwards. Her whole body trembled ; not a limb, not a muscle, not a nerve that did not twitch. With tottering steps she reached the door of the room. She tried to compose herself ; she wanted to put the tray down before Miss Abercorn as gently as possible, but she could hold it no longer, it slipped from her hands, came on to the table with a jerk.

Bertha's eyes flew round searchingly. Drink, drink—where was the bottle? Not on the table, not on the chest of drawers, not on the sideboard. But there!—she almost uttered a cry of joy—there on the shelf, just above Miss Abercorn's head, stood her liqueur !

The very sight of it gave her relief, the spasms subsided a little. Oh, a chance of deliverance ! A mouthful quickly, or she must drop. She stammered hoarsely : “ Can I—may I—my bottle ? ”

The lady looked at her coldly with her black eyes.

“ I must—one drop—I'm ill ! ”

The lady's pitiless eyes still rested upon her.

“ Only a drop—oh, my chest, my stomach ! ” Bertha writhed and moaned.

“ Put on some hot compresses ! ” Apparently calm, the lady poured out her weak tea, but her hands trembled. Suppose she were to be taken ill? She was so strange !

“ Here, drink this ! ” She pushed a cup of tea across to the girl. “ Drink it quite hot, it will do you good ! ”

“ No, no ! ” Bertha pushed the cup back with disgust. “ My bottle ! A drop ! ”

“ Spirits ! ”

“ It's not spirits—medicine ! Miss Abercorn, dear lady, give me the bottle ! It's medicine ! Only to-day—one drop—I don't drink—I feel so bad—so very bad ! ” The excited girl began to sob violently.

Miss Abercorn moved restlessly on her seat. “ You are quite out of your mind, Bertha, ” she said. “ Do compose yourself ! I will give you some valerian drops. ”

“ No, no ! Oh, only one drop ! Oh, don't be so cruel ! ” Bertha's eyes were fastened on the bottle.

Miss Abercorn got up from the sofa. “ How can I give it you ? ”

It is poison for you!" She went to lock away the bottle in the sideboard. Bertha stood in her way. Without a word she stretched out her hand with an imperative gesture.

The lady shook her head, evaded her, and opened the door of the side-cupboard. She put in the bottle hastily. "It is out of your sight now!"

She wanted to close the door quickly, but Bertha pulled it open again.

"It's mine—I've bought it!"

Each of the two women snatched at the bottle. Miss Abercorn held it up above her head—she had a much longer arm.

"But, Bertha, what are you thinking of?" Involuntarily she uttered a cry—Bertha had given a spring. Like a cat that snaps at a bird, she seized the lady's thin arm and pulled it down.

"My liqueur!" she panted. Her greenish, squinting eyes looked wildly at her mistress. "I'm to put up with that, too," she screamed, and pressed after the retreating woman. "You've shut me up! Made me a'most crazed here! Searched my box, an' now—d'ye think I'm going to put up with that, too? I've bought it with my own money—give it to me—give me my bottle!" She fought like a wild cat; her fair, Madonna face was distorted.

Miss Abercorn uttered a second, piercing cry. What—she dared touch her! Terror seized her—she was alone, quite alone with this person! She was in an agony; already she felt strangling hands at her throat. Groaning, she brought out: "What are you thinking of?"

"My bottle!"

"Let—go!" The lady's black eyes almost started out of her head. Help! There was murder—murderous lust gleaming in the maid's eyes.

The lady's hand no longer held the bottle—crash, there it lay in pieces, and the liquid ran over the boards. An overpowering smell of alcohol filled the room.

They both screamed—mistress and maid.

Bertha had drawn back and stared vacantly at the liquid, which ran in all directions.

Miss Abercorn took advantage of this moment; she rushed into

her bedroom close by, slammed the door behind her and bolted it. . . .

The tea on the table was long cold, the clock had struck ten ; Bertha still stood there motionless, with frightened, wide-open eyes.

Now, as if awaking, she passed her hand over her forehead and then fell on her knees by the pieces of glass. But, however closely she examined the pieces, wherever she dipped her fingers, there was not a drop to lick up—all the alcohol had evaporated—there was only a large, dark, sticky stain on the boards.

She went mechanically, fetched the floor-cloth, and rubbed and wiped, and when the dark stain no longer marked the place, and she had collected and carried away the broken bits, the perception of what she had done flashed across her. Her mistress would give her notice, that was certain. No, she would be turned out disgraced and branded, probably to-morrow, and if she did not go quietly Miss Abercorn would fetch the police.

The spasms had gone, the terrible excitement subsided, she was quite clear again.

Oh, what had she done ! This character would be worse than any she had had before. She would never get a situation with it. And winter was before the door. And she had no inclination to work—none at all !

Quite beside herself, weak as a child, in a flood of tears, she crouched on a stool in the corner of the kitchen. And the weeping became convulsive—a loud, sobbing, screaming lament. She could not stop it ; it shook her, caught her breath, exhausted her. And then she was obliged to laugh—laugh at herself for weeping so loudly. It had been very amusing to see Miss Abercorn's terror ! Yes, she had very nearly throttled her. When the old woman's bones were under her hands she had the feeling that she must grip her throat and press it till she could no longer scream—not even draw breath !

Bertha left off weeping and laughing. Springing up out of the corner, she drew up her slight young figure to her full height.

Everything was at an end here ; yes, but not at an end altogether ! She was young—young and pretty. If she could not get on here she would go elsewhere. But where ? Home ? The

corners of Bertha's mouth went down in an ugly smile ; she could tipple with her mother there. No, no !

But where, then ? A picture suddenly appeared before Bertha's roving eyes. She saw herself in the throng in the registry office ; she saw the fat man standing before her, and distinctly heard his voice—

“Sixteen pounds ! Little work ! And when it's too dull for you up-stairs you can come down—there's always something on. Who knows, perhaps you'll make your fortune ! . . .”

Why had she been so foolish as to refuse this offer, even to run away ? Oh, how stupid !

She began to weep again, struck her head, and sobbed heart-rendingly. She sat there helpless.

The clock inside the room boomed eleven. No sound was to be heard of Miss Abercorn ; she would not show herself again—a good thing, too, or—— !

Bertha clenched her fists ; wild, uncontrollable rage came over her again ; her eyes glittered threateningly. Yes, it was her fault if she came on to the streets !

The streets—— ? All at once the thought was there. It had come without notice, and now it stood before her in all its nakedness, and grinned at her.

And she saw the street. The gas-lamps flickered in the wind, the stars sparkled coldly and cruelly on the cloud-rent sky. Solitary women glided over the pavement, came to a standstill at the lamp-post and looked round. A policeman appeared at the corner—you saw the gleam of his buttons—the dark figures glided away, disappeared, driven by the wind.

On the streets—ah ! She shuddered and wrung her hands. But what else was left her ? . . .

And again Mr. Lehmann stood before her. He smiled broadly and blinked at her confidentially ; and yet it was the glance of an experienced business man taking in her charms. Was he not right—would she not be the very one to pour out the wine, present it, persuade to drink ? . . .

It was warm there ; the wind did not whistle there as in the streets at night, and no policeman made you move on. And when the others drank you could drink yourself—beer, wine,

liqueur—ah, much, very much! Drink: bitter drinks, sweet drinks, whatever you had a wish for! Her tongue passed longingly over her dry lips.

No more service! She would rather die than take another place.

A long procession passed along the white kitchen wall: shadows, shadows, tired shadows. Many a one was among them whom she had known. Was she not there herself?

With a deep sigh she threw her hands before her face, and trembled and shivered.

How the shadows tormented her! She saw them with her eyes shut! . . . They took hands; they formed a circle round her. "Serve, serve, always serve," they groaned into her ear.

No! She screamed loudly. She would serve no longer! She would rule, as others did. No more drudgery, no more being ordered about, no more crouching, no more breaking her nails with work—only for the bit of daily bread. She would enjoy her life!

And a hatred arose in her, she did not know herself against whom, and a vague idea of "ruling, ruling."

Stretching herself, she raised her arms to the whitewashed kitchen ceiling, on which the quivering circles of light danced. Her upper lip lifted in a cold smile; she thought of all the men who had run after her. Now she would be able to try her power in the restaurant where there were waitresses! Serve? Oh no; she would put her foot on their necks and—rule!

A hard, steely gleam changed the blue of her eyes. Leaning against the edge of the kitchen-range, her arms crossed over her breast, and rocking gently backwards and forwards on the tip of her toes, she stood reflecting. The cold, cruel smile remained on her lips.

## XXXV

THE old Reschkes in the cellar had been obliged to sell their piano; the teacher had been dismissed long ago. Ella had practised no more scales, only strummed with one finger: "Oh, my dearest Augustin, what shall we do?"

They were doing badly; they needed ready money; the dealer from whom they procured their goods would wait no longer with his demands. The piano fetched six pounds; if it had not stood in such a damp place it would certainly have fetched eleven. But now, at least, they were in smooth water again; they could get things on credit once more.

Fewer and fewer servants came into the cellar; most of them did their marketing at a third greengrocer's that had been opened in the Göbenstrasse a short time before. It was fitted up in the latest fashion: had an automaton which, if you put a penny in the slot, gave you a bottle of scent, a picture postcard, and returned you a halfpenny; and—the owner, a young man living with his mother, was unmarried.

Mrs. Reschke no longer had to complain about the constant din; the bell rang seldom, and then quite meekly, shyly and softly. Children came to fetch something for a halfpenny, and a few old women from the neighbourhood.

If Mrs. Reschke had possessed her former enterprising spirit, she would have arranged all sorts of surprises for Christmas, which would infallibly have drawn customers; but she had lost her "spunk," as she herself said.

She could shuffle about alone in the shop for hours, and mumble to herself; talking had become second nature. She repeated the same story over and over again, and every time in a different way; she had entirely forgotten the circumstances.

"But, mamma, you've told the story fifty times," Ella would sometimes burst out with, "an' it weren't like that! It's all nonsense; you muddle everything!"

"You let mother be," said her father, and then blinked his dull eyes. "Now, my dear, 'ow was it?"

In the grey November days they had to leave the lamp lighted in the cellar from early morning till evening, only at midday there was an hour of scanty daylight.

The old man thought that never in his whole life had he felt the darkness so much as now. And when he went to Arthur and Mina in the Alvenslebenstrasse, it was not much lighter there; they lived on the ground floor in a court not much broader than a shaft, and the winter sun never threw a pale gleam into the little bedroom and kitchen.

What would they have done without the grandchild? She had fair hair like Gertrude's had been, only Gertrude's had been silkier, and there was more of it; later on it had turned such a beautiful chestnut. The grandfather often took the child on his lap and twisted her thin locks round his rough finger—oh, the hair would not curl at all! He looked very serious over it, and Frida too; she was such a sensible child, she always knew if she might laugh or must sit as quiet as a mouse.

Instead of the sun, a pale face looked in through the window-panes of the bedroom and kitchen—it was care.

Arthur could not succeed in finding permanent employment; once only he had work for a week, and then it was over. It was not always his fault, and to this he clung in his bitterness. Could he help it freezing hard at the beginning of November? He had been employed to carry stones for a house in building, and though the heavy load nearly crushed his shoulders, and climbing up the ladders made him giddy, yet the wages had been good. It had lasted a week, and then came snow, a thin coating of ice everywhere; the mortar would not stick—it was over.

But he had caught a cold, which he could not get rid of so easily. Although Mina packed him up in everything she had, wrapped her petticoats round his feet in bed of an evening, and took him in her arms, yet he lay awake the whole night shivering, and only got warm in the morning when he had to get up. His mother wanted to make him a herb-tea for his cough, but he snapped at her: "Should ha' taught me a trade, then you wouldn't have wanted to make tea for me now. Drink your stuff yourself!"

It was fortunate that Mina had her charing and washing places;

the rent for the first month at least they could pay punctually. At the beginning of October, Mina had even had too much to do; every one wanted to have a thorough cleaning before the winter, and people who were moving required help. With the best will in the world she could not satisfy everybody; they were offended with her, and so she lost places on which she had depended.

The end of October there was less demand for her services, the beginning of November still less, and soon none at all. Was her taking Frida with her the cause of it? She got into nobody's way, sat so quietly between the soiled linen by the wash-tub, and played with some clothes-pegs; the little figure quite disappeared in the steam as in a cloud. When her mother cleaned rooms she ran backwards and forwards, fetched dust-pan and brush, and picked up bits, and threads, and flocks of dust with her tiny fingers. At dinner she pecked like a bird from her mother's plate. Mina said to herself that could not be the reason that she was so seldom engaged. At last she understood; a lady who was very well disposed to her said almost reproachfully, she must not work so hard now, but take care of herself; and, of course, they had consideration for her condition now. And the lady wrote down her address, and promised to be sure and have her afterwards.

Take care of herself! Mina smiled sadly when she thought of it. Oh, the best thing for her would have been if they had had enough to eat every day, if Frida had not said, pitifully, many an evening: "Frida hungry!"

They had not indeed gone to bed quite hungry yet, but Mina lay with open eyes many a long winter night and saw the time coming when their stomachs would be empty, and no fire would burn in the stove, which consumed so much fuel and yet did not warm the little lodging; the floor was always cold to the feet. Then she got so frightened that in the middle of the night she nudged her husband: "Arthur! If't were only spring!"

"Yes, if it were," he replied, and his voice expressed the whole wretchedness of their position. . . .

One day Mina had a good idea. So many people read the *Lokalanzeiger*, another woman would certainly be wanted to leave the newspapers at the houses. She had made inquiries—fifteen shillings a month—it was not much for a whole family, but when



Arthur was pretty well again he would probably earn a little. So she put on a shawl, which hid her figure, and—she did not know herself what to say of her luck—she was engaged to deliver the newspapers!

Every morning, very early, she was at the branch-office of the *Lokalanzeiger* in the Bülowstrasse, and again in the afternoon, and fetched her share. Her mother-in-law had lent her the old perambulator, there was room in this for Frida and the newspapers.

Unweariedly she trudged through the snow and mud; while she went into the houses to knock at the back-doors or push the paper under the mat, Frida kept guard outside. If only there had not been so many flights! Mina panted up painfully, holding on by the banisters; her thick shoes, soddened by the snow, left great marks behind her. It got later and later before she had done, just like the other newspaper-women; if Frida's little legs had been stronger she could have managed a few houses alone. But she could not do that yet. When a policeman forbade the wheeling of the perambulator on the pavement, and it was too hard work to push it through the deep snow on the road, Frida hung to her mother's skirts like lead.

But, strange to say, since the child came with her many doors opened wider. The half-frozen mite of the newspaper-woman found friends. Where there were cooks, indeed, the door was slammed to again immediately, but many a house-wife, who answered the knock herself, gave them a cup of warm coffee, and mother and child, sitting on the stairs, shared the treat. And once Frida even got an apple! Two kind little girls, Nora and Elsie, gave it her. She did not venture to eat it at once; she brought it home with her. . . .

Groups of fir-trees began to appear at the corners of the streets and on the promenades; whole avenues of scented, dark-green Christmas-trees sprang up.

At midday Arthur appeared, intending to carry home the trees for the purchasers. But he got none to carry. Only very few came to buy at present, and others were quicker in offering their services than he. Before he had taken a step forward they had already seized the tree and dragged it away.

There was a draught at the corners, he had no warm gloves, and was miserably cold in his threadbare overcoat ; and the others laughed at him on account of this coat. They wore none, only coarse jerseys, but thick woollen scarfs round their necks, and caps with flaps over the ears. The wind seemed to have a special design on Arthur's broad-brimmed hat ; to seize it, tear it from his head, whirl it away, was a matter of a moment, and Arthur had to rush after it.

It was the bitterest day for Arthur when he had to borrow an old cap of his father's, which he used to wear when going to market. Mrs. Reschke, indeed, said it suited her son, especially when he put it a little on one side ; but Arthur did not smile as he usually did at his mother's flatteries, but looked gloomily before him.

Now he posted himself in the market-halls ; not only before the nearest at Magdeburger Platz—no, he went to the Lindenstrasse, and when he could get there early enough, to the old, well-known one at Alexander Platz. There was work to be got with lifting, dragging, handing, when the big dealers were loading up. You could earn quite a good deal ; Arthur remembered that his father gave a penny for every basket that was carried out to the cart for him. But when a fat butcher, for whom he had carried a quarter of veal and nearly broken down under its weight, only paid him a penny, he grumbled. From this time his luck seemed to have left him, every one preferred to take some one else, one of those sturdy fellows with a bull-neck and drunkard's nose.

Every now and then a trim maid-servant let the pale, handsome man, with the melancholy eyes, bring her market-basket as far as the house for her and gave him twopence ; or an old Jewish lady, for whom he had carried an enormous goose home, or delivered up the Friday's fish in the kitchen, gave him a penny. But when, one day, a stately matron in a velvet cape and flower bonnet loaded him with a bag and ever so many paper parcels, and he recognized her as Augusta, who, formerly, when she was a servant, had bought at his mother's shop, he went no more to the market. However much he pulled his cap over his forehead and lowered his head he trembled lest somebody should know him.

Now he distributed advertisements for a lately established business for repairing gentlemen's clothes, but that went to smash immediately; then came a variety theatre—"Miss Dinora, the lady with the most beautiful bosom in the world!"—after one day it was no longer necessary to advertise, the place was crowded. Then he hawked special editions: "'Orrible murder," but his voice did not carry, it was too weak, his "Murder, murder," was drowned in the noise of the streets.

Then he ran from one large shop and place of business to another; sometimes a job was to be got to help the house-porters in loading and unloading the carts. It was paid sixpence an hour; now at Christmas, the harvest-time of the shops, help was often wanted. His overcoat, indeed, was ruined over it, Arthur saw with alarm that the pile was entirely gone from the right shoulder and right arm. So he left it at home and only wore his coat, under which he put on an old crocheted waistcoat; Mina tried to make him take her shawl too, but he got angry.

"Wear it yerself," he screamed irritably, and pushed her away; but yet there was anxiety in his tone, and also in the glance with which he scanned her figure.

It had not been so cold for years as this winter. The fall of snow in November had left off in December, but the ground was frozen a foot deep, a keen wind drove all the moisture out of the air and cut like a knife. The little sparrows died from the cold; ravens and crows came in from the fields outside, fluttered on the roof-trees of the houses and looked down hungrily into the court-yards. Flights of these starving birds flew cawing through the gardens, and then disappeared somewhere in their depths.

Mina had got hold of some old packing-cases, chopped them up, and when Arthur came home stuffed some of the wood into the kitchen stove. It crackled and flared so that Frida laughed loudly, but the ice-flowers on the windows did not thaw; there was an impenetrable wall between the little world inside and the great world outside.

Mina delivered her newspapers with steps that became heavier and heavier, and a still heavier heart—Arthur was ill again. This time it was not so much his cough as a violent pain in the abdomen, which had seized him after having lifted a bale of

cloth clumsily on to a van that he was loading. Now he had to go to the doctor every day; he had that for nothing, but the embrocation cost money, and the doctor had strictly forbidden him to lift or carry for a long time.

"Always was an' always shall be a poor thing," groaned Arthur. "Just my luck!" He would not see his mother at all. When anxiety about her son drove Mrs. Reschke to the little flat, which she otherwise scarcely ever entered, Arthur dragged himself into the bedroom as quickly as he could, banged the door behind him, and turned the key in the lock.

Mother Reschke knocked: "Arthur, open the door! Arthur, it's me!"

Not a sound from the bedroom.

"Arthur, Arthur! Don't yer 'ear? Yer mother! Arthur!"

He must have heard her, and yet he did not open the door. He did not even give an answer.

"He won't see anybody," said Mina, as if to excuse him; she stood by embarrassed, and pulled at her apron.

Mrs. Reschke wept.

When she had gone Mina reproached her husband. "Why are yer so? You should ha' let her in. She stood there an' made such eyes, an' knocked an' listened. I were that sorry."

"Be quiet," he grumbled. "Are you beginning too? I won't see her!"

"But why not?"

"Because I won't!" And he threw himself to the other side of the bed into which he had retreated in the unheated room, and turned his face to the wall. But he felt for her hand, and held it tight; Mina had to sit on the edge of the bed by him.

Arthur soon improved enough to get about once more. Then he remembered a habit of his bachelor days, of that one year, as he said half bitterly, half jokingly, in which he had not been in leading-strings. Then, when he had wandered about in Berlin, he had earned something and amused himself too by taking up a position before the public ball-houses at night, fetching cabs and pulling open the cab doors for the daintily shod feet of the music-hall and demi-monde ladies. They were not stingy.

And so he went off there now every evening after Mina was long in bed and asleep.

“Leo, give the poor feller a few pence,” one morning, towards four, a yawning person with fair, golden hair said to her companion, a fashionably dressed man, with an inclination to embonpoint, and blue shadows on the shaven cheeks and full chin. And drawing the red, fur-trimmed mantle closer round her shoulders with a shiver, she added impatiently, as she saw him still fumbling in his purse, “Give him somethin’; who knows in wot cellar he sticks!”

The voice seemed familiar to Arthur, something in the carriage too—the woman reminded him of Gertrude. Nevertheless he crept home, without being especially excited by the encounter; he had only one thought—to drink something warm and then sleep. He did not care about anything else.

For the first time they could not pay the rent; they had certainly not been punctual with it in November: and they owed six shillings at the baker’s, and five shillings at the grocer’s. Mina no longer ventured to go herself to fetch what she wanted, Frida was sent with a list while her mother waited in the nearest doorway.

Christmas Eve drew near. The display in the shop-windows became more and more tempting. The last Sunday before the Feast Mina went as far as the Potsdamerstrasse with Frida to show her the shops. The child gazed with round eyes and open mouth; she was beside herself with delight, and wept when her mother would not stand any longer before the curly-headed dolls and the warm little cloaks and caps and muffs.

The approaching Christmas seemed not only to open the purses, but also the hearts; Mina never begged for anything and yet she got presents.

“Perhaps it will be a Christmas baby,” said a bright, handsome lady, the mother of the two little girls, Nora and Elsie, who had once given Frida an apple. She always took in the *Lokalanzeiger* herself, and now she gave the newspaper-woman a little jacket, and two of her youngest child’s chemises.

“How can you make such a fuss about the beggarly things?” grumbled Arthur, when Mina came home blissfully happy, and

showed him the little garments. "Take 'em away. I don't want to see the muck!"

With a tender gesture she smoothed and folded the little chemises which Arthur had tossed aside roughly, and carefully put away everything; but the gleam of joy had gone from her face. Arthur had no feeling at all for the child that was coming! She had not been glad at first either, no indeed, but now a ray of joyful expectation had come into her heart.

"And, lo, the star stood over where the young Child was. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

"And the angel said, Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!"

Mina had recited this many years ago, at Christmas, sitting on a wooden bench, in the warm, cosy schoolroom, her straight flaxen hair carefully smoothed. Now, after all this time, she thought of it again. A hope awoke in her.

And she lay in her cold room the long winter night and turned over these words in her heart.

### XXXVI

FATHER RESCHKE had had Christmas trees for sale for his customers every year, more to oblige them than for profit, and because he took delight in the green trees which came from wood and heath. And this year he would not give up the custom. A memory of the slender young pine which, as a boy, he filched from Golmütz Wood every Christmas had possession of him; even down in the musty cellar he thought there was the resinous scent of that young pine.

This year he only had trees for poor people, miserable, little things, crooked and gnarled, and with half their needles gone; the big dealers, who appeared at the stations with carts and horses

to fetch away the trees, had despised them. He had placed a squad of them on the pavement close to the cellar-entrance, and the old man stood on the steps and with half-closed eyes watched over his wood. He drew in the pine scent with dilated nostrils; he was so absorbed that he did not notice how Ella and the street children who played touch between the trees threw them over in spite of the stands which he had made for them from the covers of packing-cases.

The only pretty tree which was really green and well-grown Father Reschke had put on one side; when people wanted to buy it—they had no special desire for the others—he said every time, “Am sorry, it’s disposed of!”

Mina had intended to beg a little tree of her father-in-law, but when she came on the morning of the 24th he had just got rid of the last. “Gran’father, you might ha’ thought of Frida,” she said reproachfully. The old man looked round embarrassed.

But there was another tree, half hidden behind the leaf of the door. Oh, how well grown it was and full of fresh, green needles! Mina passed her hand over the crinkled branches of the little tree in just the same way as she stroked Frida’s hair. “That’s a fine ‘un!”

“Let it be,” said the old man restlessly, and walked up and down undecidedly between her and the tree. She could see he was hesitating. But then he said resolutely, “No, no, let it be; I really can’t—it’s disposed of!”

Mina went away sadly; if she could only get a little tree with a few candles on it—even if she had nothing else to give to Frida! She dreamt day and night of a “tree with lights.” But there was not a spare penny for it.

Never before had Mina felt her poverty so keenly; to-day, for the first time, she was quite poor—her child would have no tree.

With misty eyes, weary and heavy laden, she dragged herself along the Bülow Promenade. Where the high fir-trees had stood some little branches which had been chopped off were still lying she picked them up, but, however much she turned and twisted and arranged them, no tree was to be made out of them.

In the afternoon, Father Reschke, with the little round fir-tree under his arm, walked across the bleak fields to the churchyard

He had to fight against the wind, it threw handfuls of frozen particles of sand into his eyes; it was hard work walking. At last he had reached the gate, at last—between all the mounds—he had found what he wanted! He had reached his goal; he put down the Christmas Tree on Maggie's grave.

“There, Maggie!”

He said nothing more; but he stood a long time by the hillock, his hat between his folded hands; the cold winter wind played with his grey hair.

It was getting dark. When he turned to go home something fluttered towards him like a great crow; it was a floating crape veil, but only when he was quite near did he recognize who wore it.

“Why—mother!” he cried, blinking his reddened eyes.

Mother Reschke brought a little tree too; it was dressed with coloured paper chains, stars of gold paper, and red and blue candles.

“Light the candles for Maggie,” she said softly, and gave her husband a box of matches. But whatever trouble the old man took, and however much his wife placed herself as a screen against the wind and held out her skirts, the lights went out again and again.

She was getting impatient, but he said resignedly, “Let it be, mother; it must do without lights!” And then he took her hand and drew her by him: “Stand 'ere, my dear!”

So they stood side by side, they did not speak another word. He only blew his nose once, and she jerked her veil over her face. The veil gave her much trouble, sometimes it bellied out like a sail, sometimes it twisted round her neck like a cord. And then they both sighed from the bottom of their hearts.

They were not at all in a hurry to get home—Ella could quite well take their place, there was so little doing in the shop, scarcely anything! . . .

Dusk came on cold and bitter, a cutting north wind blustered through the streets. The weather was anything but cheering, and yet people hurried along gaily. Everybody looked bright, and the children's faces glowed with the thought of coming delights.



Mina had to take her child on her arm, she was afraid of her being knocked over. People blocked the pavements before the shops, every one wanted to buy a present quickly; men and women hurried along loaded, gentlemen and ladies drove past hardly to be seen for their parcels. Christmas cakes were carried along; Frida's eyes got quite round when the wind lifted the white cloth that covered them.

Children came from a Christmas treat; hand in hand in a long row they took up the whole of the pavement, and sang a Christmas carol with their young voices. The wind carried the words away, but if you did not understand them you guessed them.

The bells of the churches were ringing. Many churches as Berlin has, there seemed to be more of them to-day; the whole air vibrated with the clang and the clash of the bells.

Colour gradually came into Mina's pale, tired face, but not from the keen air alone; her heart beat, and deep, deep within, another heart-beat answered, softly, like the ticking of a watch.

"Be quiet," she said to Frida, who began to cry with cold and hunger. "They'll soon be lighting up the Christmas trees, look out for them!"

And the child left off weeping, stretched her neck, and waited patiently.

At last Mina had left her last papers: it was a good thing she had done; she found it very hard work climbing the many flights, she had to stop on every landing, cling to the banister and get her breath. On her way home the candles were already burning on the Christmas trees standing in the bay-windows. Frida was pleased, but she stretched out her little hands and wanted a tree with lights too.

"Don't tease," said Mina at last, quite exhausted.

They came home; the kitchen was still dark, the little lamp was not lighted in the room either, and yet Arthur was there. He sat by the cold kitchen stove; groping about for the matches, Mina touched his hair.

"Lor', Arthur!"

He did not move.

"Have ye been here long?"

He uttered an inarticulate sound, it might have been "Yes."

"Didn't ye earn anythin' to-day?"

"No."

She sighed deeply.

He too.

"And there's so much doin' in the streets to-day!"

"Yes, for them as has money," he said grimly.

She noticed by his breath he had drunk something.

"Haven't ye anythin'?" she asked hesitatingly, and stretched out her hand. If she had only a half-penny to buy Frida a bun! And it was Christmas! "Nothing at all——?"

"Don't catechise me so! Somebody gave me a penny for fetching him a cab and putting parcels into it. A penny—haha! It's all the same if yer have it or not, 'twouldn't be enough. I hadn't had anything warm in my stomach, an' I got a dram with it."

"Lor', Arthur, now I ain't got nothin', nothin' at all for Frida!"

"I can't help ye!" But his voice trembled as he said it. Calling Frida to him he took her on his lap, and she sat there quite quietly. She knew: to-day she must not talk.

There was a mournful silence in the cold kitchen. Mina tramped heavily backwards and forwards, pulled out the drawers of the table, rummaged in the cupboard, and examined the pockets of Arthur's overcoat. Not a bit of bread, not a scrap of sausage, and not a farthing! only a handful of potatoes in the basket and a remnant of coffee in a paper bag.

Her hand trembled as she put the last coals into the stove and lit a fire with old newspapers. Should she go to her neighbour and borrow something? Oh, she had nothing herself! To her-parents-in-law? It would soon be all over with them too! If the baker would not let them have anything to-morrow, nor the grocer either, what then? To-day they had potatoes, but to-morrow!

A sudden faintness seized her; dropping what she held in her hand she sank on to the nearest seat with a deep sigh.

Arthur raised his head and looked at her without a word, but with eyes that frightened her.

Forcing a pitiable smile, she said, "Arthur, yer know I gets tips at New Year!" She tried to inspire herself and him with courage.

"If we're not all dead by then," he said gloomily, let Frida slip from his lap, got up quickly and went into the bedroom.

There he sat down on the edge of the bed in the pitch darkness, and stared into the black void that surrounded him. Here at least he did not see his wife's downcast face and Frida's hungry eyes.

The whole day he had felt very miserable. When he had seen everybody hurrying along making purchases and carrying home parcels a wild rage had arisen in him; he would like to have doubled his fist and smashed the first shop-window he came to so that the splinters flew. He had waited hour after hour, at the corners, before the drapers' shops, before the gingerbread shops, before every place of business where eager crowds streamed in and out; nobody gave him the chance of earning a copper. And he got so cold, so cold, even his heart felt frozen. And when he at last got a penny he had been obliged to wash his rage down with a drink—now he was sorry. A penny was something sacred for Mina.

"Poor Mina!" He said it quite softly to himself. Yes, she would be better off if he were not there! One mouth less. She would manage better alone. She was so saving, and when she could go washing again she would support herself and her children respectably. Compassionate souls would help a deserted wife; and she was not thin-skinned, it was not hard for her to be grateful, she could be so entirely happy over an old curtain or a child's cast-off chemise.

No—he winced—he could not! Stand there like a beggar, humiliate himself more and more! His thoughts flew back quickly over the period of time that separated him from his school-days; a blush overspread his face—he had sunk so low! No, it was better that he went! . . . But where? . . . Disappear again in the ocean of the great town as formerly? Loiter and lounge about, sleep out of doors when he had no money for the doss-house? Lie about on the seats in the squares, let the sun warm his back and fill his empty stomach? No, no, he could not do that again! He was much too tired for that, much too old.

He passed his hand over his sunken chest and then felt his thin arms. How quickly he had aged! When he was thirty, he would have grey hair—yes, quite grey. . . .

Now all that was wanting was that the landlord should turn them out; he had threatened them with it for weeks. He was no longer to be satisfied with the payment of a shilling now and then, he demanded the whole of the rent in arrear for November. But where was the money to come from?

Arthur clutched his disordered hair. Yes, he must go! Run away again—but not as before!

Two cabmen, on a cabstand to-day, had spoken of a man who had hung himself for love. Sitting on their box, and laughing loudly, they had shouted the news at one another.

For “Love”! Humbug, there was no such thing! Arthur laughed bitterly. “Want” was so often given as a reason in the police-reports, and that was correct.

He could see himself quite clearly dangling from a bare branch in the Park. The full moon shone on his face, ice crystals clung to his moustache. . . .

How the old woman took on! She made such an outcry that the whole of the Göbenstrasse came to see what had happened. The bell under the step would twang and jangle again the whole day. Well, he would not hear it.

To see and hear nothing more, that was the best thing, the only good thing left him.

It was dark night in the room, not a ray of moonlight or starlight penetrated the thick ice-flowers on the window. He trembled violently. Yes, he would go. And soon! Otherwise he would drop here and not be able to move for weakness. In spite of his excitement he felt gnawing hunger; his stomach was painfully convulsed, he had cramp in his intestines. He turned giddy.

Only quick, quick! He had not a rope, braces would do as well. . . . But not here in the room. That he would not do for his wife's sake, and just at Christmas too. She could be glad to be rid of such a scamp! But no, he was not a scamp, only a poor devil. He felt infinite pity for himself, and hesitated. He broke out in a cold perspiration.

Then he heard a noise in the next room, a chair was moved, Mina spoke. Was she coming? She would stop him!

With sudden, desperate resolution he started up. His hand was on the window—he would open it—jump out into the courtyard—run away, and . . .

“Arthur!”

He paused.

And now there was a cry of joy.

“Arthur, Arthur!” Mina pulled open the door, with quite unusual liveliness she rushed at her husband; she took hold of his sleeve. “There, look—who’d ha’ thought it! Do look!”

Two embarrassed-looking children stood in the middle of the kitchen. They were well-dressed little girls with rosy, pleasant faces. The eldest had just unpacked quite a large basket; on the table lay a piece of pork, rice, coffee, sugar, and a long cake.

In her eyes shone the joy of giving; now she said timidly and yet importantly, “Mother says you’re to have a nice Christmas too!” Nudging her little sister she whispered, “Now, Elsie, you know what you’re to give!—Here Mrs. Reschke, you’re to buy something for your little girl, mother says.”

In Mina’s hand lay a florin. She stared and wondered and could not believe in her happiness. “Wot, wot,—I’m to have that too?”

Little Elsie nodded. “Yes. And Nora’s to say——”

“I know,” interrupted the bigger one quickly, went up to Mina, curtsied, and gave her her hand: “A happy Christmas!”

Mina had slowly sunk on her knees; she put both arms round the little girls. “Oh, an’ she gave me the beautiful chemises an’ the little jacket only the other day! Oh, the dear, good mother! Oh, you kind children!” In the joy of her heart she clasped them so tightly that they drew back abashed.

“We must go,” said the elder shyly.

The little one had already tripped to the door. “Now we’ll have our tree!”

“Frida, Frida,” cried Mina—the child had stood there till now silent and bashful—“say thank ye too! Look, two shillings! An’ so much to eat!”

Frida’s big eyes almost devoured the cake, and Arthur’s pale

cheeks too had reddened slightly at the sight of the food. Strange, it was not hard for him to-day to thank these pleasant-looking children.

He gave his hand to the eldest. "Give our best thanks to your mamma. Our very best thanks!"

The door had closed behind the children, now their happy voices were heard in the courtyard.

Then Mina's pent-up joy burst forth; she took up the piece of pork and weighed it blissfully in both hands. "Such a lot o' meat! That'll last the Christmas days—oh no, much longer!"

"Well, well!" Arthur considered it critically. "It's long enough since we've had any—quite a nice piece!" His mouth watered. "I'm hungry!"

"There!" She handed him the cake.

He cut a slice for himself and then one for Frida. Only now she believed in her happiness; with a cry of joy and stretching out her little hands she ran to her father.

Mina bustled about; her exhaustion was gone, once more she was as brisk as a young girl. She threw her shawl round her quickly. "I'll be back in a moment; look after the fire an' I'll bring coals with me."

Off she went, and Arthur, with Frida on his lap, sat by the stove again; but he no longer brooded gloomily as before, he contentedly watched the glowing sparks fall into the ash-hole and listened to the singing of the kettle. His thoughts of dying had vanished as if blown away, since he had put the first bit into his mouth. The cake was good.

Mina soon came back. "I don't think it's as cold," she said gaily, and shook out her shawl, "it's snowing. Wot d'ye think o' this, Frida?"

She had brought a little fir-tree with her; certainly it only had branches on one side, but she had got it cheap, in the cellar next door, where coal was sold; when you turned the bare half to the wall, nobody would guess that it was really only half a Christmas tree. Little candles were on it in front, six candles. They were rather thin, but they burned remarkably brightly.

Mina's eyes sparkled. A knock came at the door, she called out, "Come in!"

It was old Reschke; Frida ran to meet him. "Yer not to think gran'father 'ud forget 'er," he said to Mina, laying his hand on Frida's head. "'Ere's a doll for her, put it by the tree!" And stooping down to the child he whispered: "Will ye call it Maggie, Frida? Or"—he drew a deep breath and whispered—"or—Gertie?"

Mina took the old man's hand. "Come, father, sit 'e down here! We're still here," she said heartily.

The candles on the little tree flickered; the dried branches caught fire, and crackled softly; the poor kitchen was filled with a wonderfully strong scent.

Mina placed herself by her husband, cleared her throat, and struck up what she had once sung at home at Christmas in school; she had not forgotten the old melody. But nobody joined in; the men did not know the words, and Frida was not yet clever enough. She sang it through alone, loudly and clearly.

Her hands clasped before her she looked thoughtfully at the fir-tree. Something she had never known before stirred her soul.

She had never felt anything like it, not even when she had sat in the village church at home every Sunday; and yet the clergyman had stormed so long and impressively that the sleepers started up, the cantor intoned more vigorously and the old women sobbed louder.

When she had visited the Salvation Army with Maggie she had not had this feeling; she was disgusted. The men and women with their Hallelujahs and clapping of hands, all the hymns, the speeches, and, most of all, the acting of the angel and devil had not inspired her with devotion, but almost with aversion. Poor Maggie!

And at her wedding, in the magnificent church where the painted windows cast a wonderful light, and pillars arose high as hills, had she been conscious of anything similar there?

Mina clasped her hands tighter. Now her thoughts flew higher than pillars and walls and roofs, flew far out of the town, out into the open field.

There, above the dark earth, stood a bright star.

And above the star was One who saw her too.

A feeling of consolation and safety came over her at this thought, her blood flowed quicker through her veins in happy trust.

She whispered softly to herself—

“Our Father which art in Heaven . . .”

And then she went on aloud, devout as a child—

“Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses!”

The two men looked at her astonished, there was even something of a mocking smile round Arthur's lips. She nodded to him gravely; and then she drew Frida to her side and laid her work-roughened hand on the child's soft cheeks.

“I'll learn little lass ‘Our Father,’” she said. “Yer can believe me—yes, yes—it's good to know it. Makes life easier for us!”

### XXXVII

THE day before New Year's Eve, when it was getting dark, the second child of the young Reschkes arrived.

Mina was about to scrub her kitchen, and just managed to get into bed.

Arthur was not at home, he was delivering the newspapers for his wife; she had done it herself in the morning. He came back late; it was hard work getting through the snow, which lay deep and was falling steadily; he was tired too. He had shovelled snow the whole forenoon. Two days already he had been employed in this way: it was a very disagreeable job. In spite of the cold, the perspiration ran down him; his feet were benumbed, as his boots were not protected with thick wooden soles, his hands were chapped and bled. He felt like a martyr.

When he stamped the snow from his boots before the door of his lodging and coughed, a strange woman put her head out of the kitchen.

“Hush—Mr. Reschke, ain't it? Wish yer joy! You've got a little un!”

He went in, not hurrying himself particularly. Several women



were standing about gossiping in the kitchen, he did not even know their names, he had only seen them sometimes in passing in the entrance or courtyard.

A little puling sound came out of the bedroom close by, and then Mina's voice was heard saying weakly and with difficulty, "Is my husband there?"

The door was ajar, he pushed it open and went in. There she lay in the bitterly cold room. A little lamp burnt on a wooden stool, the clothes she had hastily slipped off lay about on the boards. On Mina's arm was a whining bundle, and Frida stood on tiptoe by the bed, as grave as an old woman and said: "Sh—sh—sh!"

Arthur bent over his wife; something like paternal pride awoke in him. "Well, Mina, a fine boy, eh?"

Her closed eyelids quivered and unclosed. "Be it you, Arthur?" Her pale lips tried to smile, but they only curved mournfully. "It's a lass!"

"Cur——!" He did not finish the word, but started back in deep disappointment; he was downright angry. Always bad luck, everywhere bad luck! He pushed Frida aside, turned round, and was going away again.

Mina called him back. Her weak fingers closed upon his arm, her imploring eyes sought his.

"A lass, Arthur—but—be good—she'll get on better."

"Yes, but how?" he said, with a twitching lip.

"Honest an' respectable," she whispered, and touched the head of the new-born child with a weak hand.

Three days later the young Reschkes moved to the old Reschkes. The landlord could not and would not wait any longer for the rent in arrear. It grieved him to turn out the poor people; he feared tears and entreaties, and therefore did not show himself downstairs; but what was he to do? He was obliged to be pressing, there were others again who pressed him hard; all wanted to live. He could let the room and kitchen to somebody else. For the arrears of rent he kept for the present the best furniture, wardrobe and bed as security; Mina was allowed to take away the kitchen shelf and the other little

things. They were glad to find a refuge in the cellar with the old people.

It was sad work moving into the new home. Arthur was not there ; he had been shovelling snow since seven o'clock in the morning ; Father Reschke had come to fetch Mina. He brought away the few things on a little truck with Frida sitting on the top ; Mina walked by it, carried her new-born child on one arm, and rested the other hand on the side of the truck.

People stopped and looked after them, street urchins whistled derisively—that was a miserable lot !

As Mina laboriously climbed down the slippery cellar-steps, some men from below met her ; they were carrying away the beautiful counter. It had been Mrs. Reschke's pride ! It was painted to look like oak, had partitions inside, and at one end the yellow brass scales. With it disappeared everything that looked like better days. Now the greengrocery was quite a common one, a miserable greengrocery for poor people.

And the household was a miserable one too.

Mina no longer delivered newspapers, she had had to begin her washing and charing again a week after her child was born—how else were they to live ? She would have liked Arthur to take over the newspapers ; shovelling snow was nothing for a continuance—it was beginning to thaw—he complained too of pains in his chest. But he opposed her wish. His pride had been too deeply wounded on the first of January, when Mina was still in bed, and he went as “ newspaper woman ” to bring his congratulations for the New Year. Then he had been obliged to do it, the want was too great ; there was no more fuel, no soup for the mother, no bread for him and Frida ; every penny was a boon.

But now Mina could earn again. He was not going to run up and down the backstairs and knock at the doors like a beggar ! Yes, they had treated him like a beggar ! When he murmured, “ The newspaper woman wishes you a happy New Year,” they had looked at him, he did not know how, had certainly handed him out sixpence, but not a creature had thanked him for his good wishes. No, he would not expose himself to such treatment again. Mina could say what she liked ! And then, to compete with women, was that the thing for him to do ? He still sulked

when he thought of it, and Mina, with a sigh had to give up her wish.

Only one person was quite happy, that was old Reschke. All at once he felt like a young father. Formerly, when his own children were little, he had not had so much time to trouble about them, he was glad when they did not get in his way; now he lived once more in his grandchildren. Frida's prattle was a welcome distraction, and the faintest plaint from the baby roused him at once from his brooding. Then he wandered up and down the room with her with a dancing step which looked very strange with his stiff legs, and rocked her unweariedly in his arms.

Every day at noon he brought the child, carefully wrapped up, to her mother, however far off she was working—in between the little screamer had to be satisfied with her bottle, which he warmed for her—and then every time he had wonderful things to relate about clever Gertie! She had to be called Gertrude, he had urged it so hard with constant entreaties and continuous sniffing. And it almost seemed as if he had found his big Gertrude again in the little one.

“Gran'father,” Mina often said, almost reproachfully, “don't spoil her so!”

“Oh, she's so little!”

“Don't matter. An' I won't have it, father!”

Then the old man smiled, quite embarrassed.

Mina did not get on so well with her mother-in-law; the two women often fell out, and always about Ella.

She was growing pretty, prettier every day; much prettier than Gertrude had been. When she capered about before the cellar-door, her arms crossed on her back, and looking up and down the street with sparkling, expectant eyes, a whole swarm quickly gathered round her. Now it was no longer the generously distributed sweets which attracted the boys.

“Mother, do let her have longer frocks,” said Mina.

“Wot! Wot d'you know about it? It's the fashion to 'ave the frock to the knee!”

“But she's too big for that. Don't ye see? They all looks at her calves! It ain't respectable!”

“Respectable!” mocked the old woman. “Now then, leave

me alone wi' 'respectable:' yer the right person to talk about that! We've got the proof of yer respectability a runnin' about!"

"Are ye meanin' Frida?" Mina's voice trembled slightly, involuntarily she drew herself up. But then she said quietly, "Wi' us, at home, they go wi' naked legs; an' when they cleans the stable the skirt don't even come to the knee. I ain't ever thought more about it. But to let her stand afore the door and show her legs is different. Wi' us at home——"

"With you at 'ome," screamed the old woman, "Lord have mercy! They're fine ones that come from the country!"

Mina was nearly flaring up, but she controlled herself and shrugged her shoulders compassionately. Let her mother-in-law say what she liked, it was really all the same. Talking was still her only pleasure.

She no longer listened to her, only when she heard the name "Bertha" she pricked up her ears. "Bertha? What about Bertha?"

The old woman triumphed. "D'ye see! Didn't I tell ye? Yes, yer friend, the innercent gel from the country, I were just talkin' of 'er!"

"D'you know where she be now?" asked Mina quickly, and suddenly interested. "She never come one single time to the Alvenslebenstrasse! An' never said good-bye when she left Miss Abercorn!" She sighed. "I couldn't do nought for her, I had so much to think about then. Have ye heard anythin' of Bertha? have she got a place now?"

"A place—yes, indeed! She's a waitress," burst out Mrs. Reschke. "'Ad a row with Miss Abercorn, and then became a waitress! Wot d'ye say to that? Yer Bertha! In a restaurant she be, down in the Friedrichstrasse, a reg'lar bad part. Mrs. Büxenstein told me yesterday. She 'eard it from the old liquor-mixer over the way. An' Bertha, 'er manager, 'e's a friend of 'im over there—pals they be!"

Mina stood dumfounded.

Mrs Reschke blustered on: "Waitress—we all know that's only to 'ide the real thing! No wages, only tips an' a percentage when the fellers drink a lot. But I've knowed it all along, it were wrote

on 'er forread. When I saw 'er come in at the door 'ere, I thought, Where did Mina pick her up? Such a lying baggage! I can 'ear 'er still say to the Captin's wife, 'I can cook, I understand everythin'!' Yes indeed! An' 'ow she did pick an' steal! I were always afraid when she came rushin' in. Well, I did my dooty by her. I've often enough warned 'er, but she were past mending, she were that lazy. Now she's done for 'erself. D'ye believe me or don't ye? You mark my words, she'll find 'erself in the prison van one day!"

Mina did not say a word. But it was a long, thoughtful, mute, and yet eloquent look she gave her mother-in-law. Then, as if rousing herself, she walked quickly to the steps at the entrance to the shop.

A couplet in Ella's shrill voice floated down from the pavement; from here you could only see her prancing, red-stockinged legs, and hear the shouting of the boys who lounged about before the door and joined in the refrain.

"Come down at once," said Mina very energetically, put up her arm and drew the child down to her by her fluttering skirts.

Even though Mina worked from early till late she could not prevent something else of the shop-fittings, the great mangle, migrating never to return.

The last sign of life seemed to have disappeared from the green-grocery with the great, substantial, wooden figure. No more rattling and squeaking, no more gossiping of the servant-girls over the piled-up baskets of linen.

Even the bell under the step had become hoarse; it ought to have been attended to, but that cost money, so it was left, and its cracked voice only gave a scarcely audible, painful croak.

Mina also felt her strength gradually flag; it was too much for her to support six persons—little Gertrude was not even counted in—and Arthur could not help her; pains in the abdomen had set in again, and his cough too. He had soon been obliged to give up shovelling snow, he could not stand it; and there had long been no more snow.

A thawing, early spring was there. All the roofs dripped, the sun put out its sharp tongue and licked the streets clean. If you

lay awake at night in the cellar you heard a gentle dropping, the walls gleamed in the lamp-light as if covered with silver, in the corner of the kitchen on the cement floor, a large, wet stain appeared. The musty, mouldy smell at the Reschkes' was worse than ever.

"I don't know wot we'll come to," moaned Mrs. Reschke when the sofa-bed was fetched out of the sitting-room one day. Now Ella had to sleep in the kitchen-table bed where Maggie had died; the little room was made over to the young couple and their children.

Mother Reschke wrung her hands over the loss of the sofa; she could not even have a comfortable nap in the afternoon now and forget all her troubles in sleep. What delightful dreams she had had in the sofa corner. All the children, all that she had once had, had sat round the table before the sofa, drunk steaming coffee and eaten sugared cake.

When she dozed a little now, sitting on a hard chair, no pleasant dreams came to her; in five minutes she started up frightened; the parrot had screeched, "Hungry! Polly hungry!"

The horrid bird with his noise! He was not even good for soup. If they could only get rid of him. But nobody would give anything for him. His plumage had lost all its colour; he was grey and shabby, and worried his feathers the whole day with his crooked beak. With bristling crest he flew at everybody who approached, and pecked viciously at every out-stretched finger.

Mrs. Reschke was furious with her former pet. "Wring its neck," she said to her husband: "I can't put up no more wi' that vicious beast!"

But as the daughter-in-law took the part of the bird, Father Reschke did not dare carry out his wife's command. "What do you want?" said Mina; "you've made it vicious."

Arthur too was in Polly's favour. When he saw his mother standing before the cage one day, while Mina was at work, with murderous looks and evidently malevolent intentions, he threatened her. "You wait till Mina comes home, you'll catch it then! Let it be!"

So the bird's life was spared; ogling craftily from his dusty corner he saw the clock disappear from the wall and many other

things besides, and screamed, "Scurvy lot! Polly hungry, hungry!"

Spring came. But there were no red-green stalks of rhubarb exposed for sale in the cellar-window, and no full baskets of early spinach stood each side of the steps. Some faded winter vegetables and potatoes, which already began to sprout, were all that was to be found there, but even these were not sold. When the goods had lain about too long to be offered to anybody the family ate them.

Mina had sewn an oil-cloth pocket into her skirt—she knew people did not like it when the charwoman came with a basket—thus she brought home many a morsel for the old people and her Arthur. But the old man passed his share on to Frida or his wife; it was all the same to him now what he ate, in the gloomy cellar dwelling he could not see what he had on his plate.

For supper Ella was sent to the cold-meat shop to fetch a penn'orth of scraps; but she always came back with, "Weren't any!" When she was to go with a jug on a Friday, to fetch some of the liquor the sausages had been boiled in, she declared every time, "He ain't made no sausages to-day," and yet the chair with the white apron hung before the butcher's door. She would not go, and so Frida was now dispatched by her grandmother to fetch what was wanted.

The child trotted off proudly, a little basket on her arm; came back blissfully happy—such beautiful sausage-ends and so much ham-fat too! All the dogs in the street jumped round her, snuffling; she had to hold up her basket and run, run, as quickly as she could. One day she came home weeping loudly, the dogs had upset her and snatched the meat and the greasy paper out of the basket. She was not to be consoled.

Mina, who came home at that moment, was very angry—why had not Ella gone? She did nothing the whole day when she came home from school; she would not even look after Gertie. If the grandfather did not happen to be there Frida had to do that too.

"Ella!" said Mrs. Reschke in an astonished tone. "Ella—go to the butcher's? She won't!"

"I'm not goin' for sausage-ends," grumbled Ella, and curled her lips.

"No, yer shan't, no, no," her mother soothed her, and gave her fair little daughter an affectionate look.

"Yer goes to-morrow," said Mina coldly, and when Ella made a grimace—smack—she had a box on the ears from the strong hand which left the mark of all five fingers on her cheek.

Mrs. Reschke was furious. Throwing one arm around Ella, she stretched out the other at Mina. She began to abuse her so loudly that the walls reverberated. She ran through the whole gamut, accusing Mina of things she had never even heard of—stories of what had perhaps happened to other servant-girls ever so long ago.

The whole *chronique scandaleuse* of the back-stairs came to light.

It was no use Father Reschke's pulling his wife's sleeve ; there was no stopping her ; all the sluices were open ; it had to come out.

"Well, then, we'll go—I an' Arthur an' the children," said Mina at last, and looked firmly in her scolding mother-in-law's face. "I'll not anger you, an' I'm not goin' to let you anger me, with all I've got besides. What d'ye say, Arthur?"

He nodded. He always agreed to what his wife said now. Her quiet resolution impressed him. "Yes, we can go," he said. "We don't need to let ourselves be abused. Of course, we'll go ! We can always earn enough for ourselves !"

Mother Reschke's torrent of words was stemmed at once ; she was thoroughly alarmed. Go——? Good Lord, if they went, if Mina were not there, who would give them money? Murmuring something unintelligible, she rocked her head to and fro.

Father Reschke opened his poor, blinking eyes wide with fright. "You'll go too, Mina? Oh, they all leave us—all of 'em!" He bent his head sniffing, tears trickled down his wrinkled cheeks.

Mina stooped over him. "No, father, I'll not leave ye."

The old man caught her hand, caressed it, smiled, and stroked his daughter-in-law's face.

They all pressed round Mina, Mother Reschke too. She behaved as if nothing had happened, and patted her on the back, giggling.

Even Ella did not sulk any longer. With a wheedling gesture she



clung to her sister-in-law's arm. Her sharp eyes saw enough ; she knew quite well now who was master here.

## XXXVIII

SUMMER dust lay on the Göbenstrasse ; the watering-cart had only sprinkled it an hour ago ; but there it was again—a scintillating, sun-warmed, fugitive, summer dust, which a mild wind bore noiselessly over roofs and houses, road and pavement.

Down in the cellar it was the dust of years—the dust of many summers and winters—which flew up as heavy as ashes when the furniture was moved ; no sunbeam had ever fallen upon it, no draught of air ever blown it away.

The man who helped Arthur clear out, swore ; he snorted and sneezed as if he had taken a pinch of snuff. They were both quite black in the face, and could hardly see or breathe.

Outside in the street stood a cart, with a bony horse in the shafts. Though their best furniture had gone, there was still enough for a load. Mina was stowing away the things ; a whole troop of children surrounded her, and grown-up people too—women with children on their arms, and old men with bent backs—kept at some distance on the pavement and stared.

The Reschkes who had lived in the cellar here for twenty-five years—the Reschkes were moving ! Who would have thought it ? They had been quite forgotten lately, now they excited general interest once more.

How the people had gone down in the world ! Many a man who stared there remembered quite distinctly how smartly this miserable looking old Reschke had sprung out of the wedding-carriage. And many a woman whispered how splendid she, Mrs. Reschke, had been in black silk and a wreath of orange-blossoms ; she had carried a bouquet as big as a cart-wheel.

They had wanted to be too fine, and now this was the end of it.

The few things which were being loaded on the cart were examined with inquisitive eyes.

Mina did not trouble about the gazers. She was quite occupied with her work ; she bustled backwards and forwards, gave a hand here, lifted and carried heavy weights in her strong arms, and called to her husband in her clear voice, "Put that there," and "Now this here !" The bright colour on her cheeks made them look rounder, and suffused her whole face with a gleam of youth.

She had never yet packed with such a light heart. Before her eyes stood continually the beautiful, brand-new house at the end of the Neue Winterfeldstrasse, where they were now allowed to live. For the present, indeed, only on trial, they must show that they could do the cleaning to the satisfaction of the Building Society which had the large offices on the ground-floor, and that they were equal to what was required from a porter.

Oh, they would do ! A world of hope swelled Mina's breast. It was just the thing for Arthur ! He was strong enough to go about in the house and see to the stairs and passages and then to the courtyard and pavement. "You shall see," he had said to his wife, and looked a head taller, "how I'll behave with the tenants, strict but just !" And the two old people could sit in the porter's lodge in turns and open the house-door ; Frida understood that already. And Mina would be able to keep one or two of her places for washing, she might get some charing in the house too, or the gentlemen in the office might give her their linen to wash.

Hope had awakened in Mina's heart. It had come overnight like refreshing rain after long, hopeless drought : the starving, thirsty fields are again clothed in green ; flowers bud and blossom.

A month ago Mina had crept across the Potsdamerstrasse in the greatest trouble. She dragged herself wearily along by the wall of the Botanical Gardens. In the jug in her hand, covered by a cloth, she had fetched coffee-grounds from the large restaurant at whose back-door, every day, towards evening, women as poor as herself, and pale, thin children assembled with baskets, and jugs, and bags, to carry home all kinds of scraps.

Frida hung to her mother's skirts crying ; the little creature had been trodden on in the crowd and pushed by those who were struggling to get in front. "Wait till we get home," Mina consoled her, "then I'll make coffee !"

But still she did not hasten her steps, she was afraid of the dark cellar.

There sat the old father, with his head between his two hands and stared before him, always at the same spot.

There the mother lamented loudly, and abusive words mingled with her sobs: twenty-seven years had they lived here, twenty-seven years! Now they could not pay the rent, it was only the second time, and they were going to be turned out by that blood-sucker, that old witch, old Abercorn, to whom the house now belonged. Bertha should have wrung her neck; it would have served her right. Going to be turned out, like rogues and vagabonds!

There Arthur raged up and down in mute despair and behaved as if he would dash his head against the wall.

No, Mina was not at all in a hurry to get back to the cellar. She herself felt so weary, so hopeless. She looked sadly at Frida, and smoothed her hair away from her reddened eyes. If only her Frida would be better off one day—at least have enough to eat.

She sank into a gloomy reverie.

Somebody stopped before her—a lady, holding a little girl by the hand.

The sunshine dazzled Mina's clouded eyes; she looked quite bewildered.

The lady smiled at her. "Why, Mina! Don't you know us?"

She woke up. It was Mrs. Miller! And that—the pretty little girl!

"Irma, pet!" cried Mina suddenly, and dropping on her knees she kissed the child, whom she had rocked on her arm many a night, and pushed up and down for hours. All at once the whole time she had spent at the Millers' rose before her. Oh, those had been good, easy days! She wept.

"At last we meet again," said Mrs. Miller. She was unmistakably glad to see her former servant, but there was pity too in the glance she gave the careworn figure of the pale woman. She patted Frida. "But why have you never come to see us?"

"Because I've been so bad off," whispered Mina, and her head

sank down on her breast. And then, all at once with a loud sob—it was a relief to cry it aloud, “Oh, very bad!”

They had stood a long time talking by the wall of the Botanical Gardens. Like little dogs, that would like to snuffle one another, but are afraid, the two little girls looked at each other, silent, with big astonished eyes.

Mrs. Miller invited Mina to come to her next Sunday, with the children. “Then you’ll see my husband too,” she said, “but we are not in the Eisenachstrasse now.”

They had moved into a larger flat; Mina was astonished at the five rooms and three flights of stairs which were even carpeted. She had seen at once that Mr. Miller was better off; his wife would probably never have plump cheeks, but she had such a good, healthy complexion now, and Irma wore a pretty frock and a white straw hat trimmed with white silk ribbon.

Mr. Miller was no longer in the Statistics Office. Conscientious worker as he was and with good recommendations, he had, for some considerable time, held a more lucrative position in a Joint Stock Building Society. It was a kind of confidential post. He looked so well-dressed now in a dark broadcloth suit and beautifully ironed shirt-front; but his kind expression and pleasant smile were the same. Mina felt her old trust in him revive. If everything had not been so different, she could have imagined he stood before her again in the narrow, dark kitchen of the Eisenachstrasse, looked at her and shook his head, “But, Mina, you only tell us that now?” He had given her good advice then—her eyes rested with deep love on her children—perhaps he could help her now!

As if Mr. Miller had guessed her thoughts, he said, “Mina, my wife has told me much about you. Yes, yes, she knows, too, what that is: the struggle for daily bread! My Building Society happens to want a reliable porter for our house in the Neue Winterfeldstrasse; the house is just ready; it is where the new square is; I have thought of you——”

“Of us?” Mina interrupted him: it almost sounded like a scream. Bending forward, she gazed at him intently; she read the words from his lips.

“Your husband can present himself in our office to-morrow.

The gentlemen are not unfavourably disposed." He could not help laughing. Mina seized him impetuously by the arm.

"We—we—a place as porter! Porter! Oh, Mr. Miller!" She had lost all control of herself; she wept and laughed, trembling with excitement. "A place as porter! I never thought we'd ever have anything so good!"

The shadow of past cares clouded her radiant face again; all the dark nights passed before her mind once more. "An' is it really true about the place?" she asked almost anxiously.

He nodded.

"Oh Lor', oh Lor', what luck! Frida, d'ye hear? A place as porter!" She was quite beside herself.

Mr. Miller became grave. He cleared his throat and laid his hand on her shoulder. "Now, Mina, calm yourself!"

"Such luck, Mr. Miller," she sobbed.

"Yes, yes, I can imagine this comes just at the right moment! But don't forget, my good woman, I can't give you any security. I——"

"D'ye mean the gentlemen won't be willing to have us?" She stared at him troubled, her eyes wide open.

"No, no, I don't mean that. But, my good woman, I mean this: don't forget that it is only a lucky chance that has brought you this post; it is no security for the future; it is no provision for life! I can undertake no guarantee; give no assurance that you—that you—h'm——" He sought for words.

"Will we get the place?" she asked hastily.

"That is certain, for the present."

"Oh, then it's all right! We gets the place—we gets the place!" Joy sent a brilliant colour into her cheeks; in a transport of delight she seized his two hands. "That's all we want! Then we're so happy!"

An almost sad smile stole round Mr. Miller's mouth. "We'll hope so, my good woman," he said. "But your husband must do his part too. Remember, three months on trial first. And if it will be anything permanent—who knows?" - He shrugged his shoulders. "But I have confidence in you. You are an upright, hard-working woman!"

"Oh, he'll do now," she assured him ingenuously. "I'll look

after that!" And then laughing for pure joy she folded her hands, "Oh Lor', oh Lor', a place as porter! Wot luck!"

Mr. Miller looked at her thoughtfully; he saw she had not quite understood him. She only thought of "to-day." But was not that after all her greatest happiness?

And so the first of July had come at last, when they would move into the new house, into the roomy dwelling in the court—two rooms and a kitchen—into which the sun shone, and which nobody had soiled. The court was a garden; the fountain in the middle was surrounded by large grass-plots, where flower-beds were to be laid out, and where evergreen bushes were already planted. Father Reschke could garden there; he had so often told lately, how, as a boy, he had grown sunflowers and coloured convolvulus against his father's fence, and they were so splendid that the whole village came to gaze at them. And the green would do his eyes good. Everything was light and bright, even the porter's lodge at the entrance. Mother Reschke had stipulated to sit there a good deal; she would attend to the door; in the court at the back there was nothing to be seen and heard of the world; you might just as well bury yourself at once, and to be able to have a chat and say what was on your mind gave you new life.

And besides the beautiful lodging they would be paid two pounds a month for cleaning the offices, house, and pavement, and attending to the lift. Mina had bold dreams; she dreamt of all sorts of extra work by which money could be earned; beating carpets, going on messages, and doing odd jobs for the inmates; the whole of the large house would be full in October. And then came New Year with the tips! Her heart beat joyfully when she thought of it.

But while the young people packed bag and baggage with light hearts, the old ones mourned.

Mother Reschke was ready to die of grief. When every piece of furniture was long moved out and the bare, gloomy cellar walls grinned doubly sad in their nakedness, she still wandered about them.

Here the great mangle had stood, and there the basket with the fine sort of pears! In this corner a mouse had drowned itself in

the petroleum, and there she had killed another, an enormous one, with her patten !

Here, at the large table before the sofa in the sitting-room, they had had many a festive meal ! Yes, that was the place, Ladewig had sat there ! When Mother Reschke thought how much he had drunk and how he had enjoyed his food, she felt a pang at her heart. She wailed loudly.

“ My dear—my dear ! ” murmured Reschke, who trotted behind her, “ don’t ’e take it so to heart ! ”

“ No, I’ll not like another place so soon, I were so accustomed to it ’ere ! Oh Lor’, oh Lor’, all the mem’ries ! D’ye remember, father ? Look ’ere, ’ere’s the crack the half-sovereign rolled into—I wonder if it’s there still ? An’ there I ’ad the goose fattenin’ ! D’ye remember ? Twenty pounds, it were summat extr’ordinary ! I never ’ad one so fat again ! ”

“ An’ ’ere Maggie died,” said the old man softly. And then when they wandered back into the room out of the kitchen, he whispered still more softly, “ An’ ’ere Gertie stood, the last mornin’ ! ”

“ Ah yes ! ”

They both remained there, silent, as if rooted to the spot ; seemingly all that was left of what had once been here.

Around them only the cracked walls and the dust and the cobwebs in the corners. . . .

“ Where are ye ? ” Mina’s loud summons sounded from the entrance.

“ Quick,” shouted Arthur. “ Come out of the old hole ! Hurrah, now we’re off ! ”

And Frida came running down. “ Come,” she said excitedly, “ mother’s calling,” and beckoned eagerly with her little hands.

The old man took his wife’s hand. “ Come, mother ! ”

Side by side, and close together, they trod the narrow cellar-steps ; the hidden bell no longer groaned under their heavy tread, it was silenced for ever—dead. They went up slowly, step by step. So close together, had they once before passed these steps, on their wedding-night, long, long years ago ; then, too, side by side, hand in hand. But never again in that way—never till to-day.

Up in the street it was light ; they looked round blinking, with

wide-open eyes. Did they see it to-day for the first time? Across the way, on the left, at the corner of the Kirchbachstrasse, Handke's grocery had disappeared, in its place a draper's shop displayed its glories. And across, to the right, where bottles and flagons had once beckoned, legs of veal, hams and sausages were hanging in a butcher's window.

Everything was different.

They sighed, looked round once more, and then followed the rattling cart.

They all moved off.

Only Ella, the cage with shabby Polly on her arm, remained behind a little. Where were all her admirers? Did they not think of saying good-bye to her? Casting keen glances to the right and left, across the street and pavement, she capered about before the yawning cavity of the cellar entrance, swinging the bird backwards and forwards. The frightened animal bristled his feathers, and screeched furiously. Then she swung it still more wildly and laughing sang loudly and shrilly—

“For this parrot, oh, this parrot,  
Has driven my lovers away——”

The note stuck in Ella's throat. Mina had turned back.

“Come,” she said, took the girl by the wrist and drew her un-resistingly away.

Mina marched sturdily in front of the little procession, upright and erect, though she carried her youngest child and a heavy parcel as well; she stepped along as happily as she had once gone over the fields at home, with a bundle of grass on her back, and a sickle in her hand. The bright sun shone into her face. She gazed into it, without blinking. The light did her so much good, the beautiful warm light of Heaven.

Her soul rejoiced and exulted like the lark that, with never-ending trills, rises from the young green of the fields into the clear azure and soars and bathes in the golden light of spring; the storms of winter are gone, and it takes no thought of frost and sleet, and winters to come.









